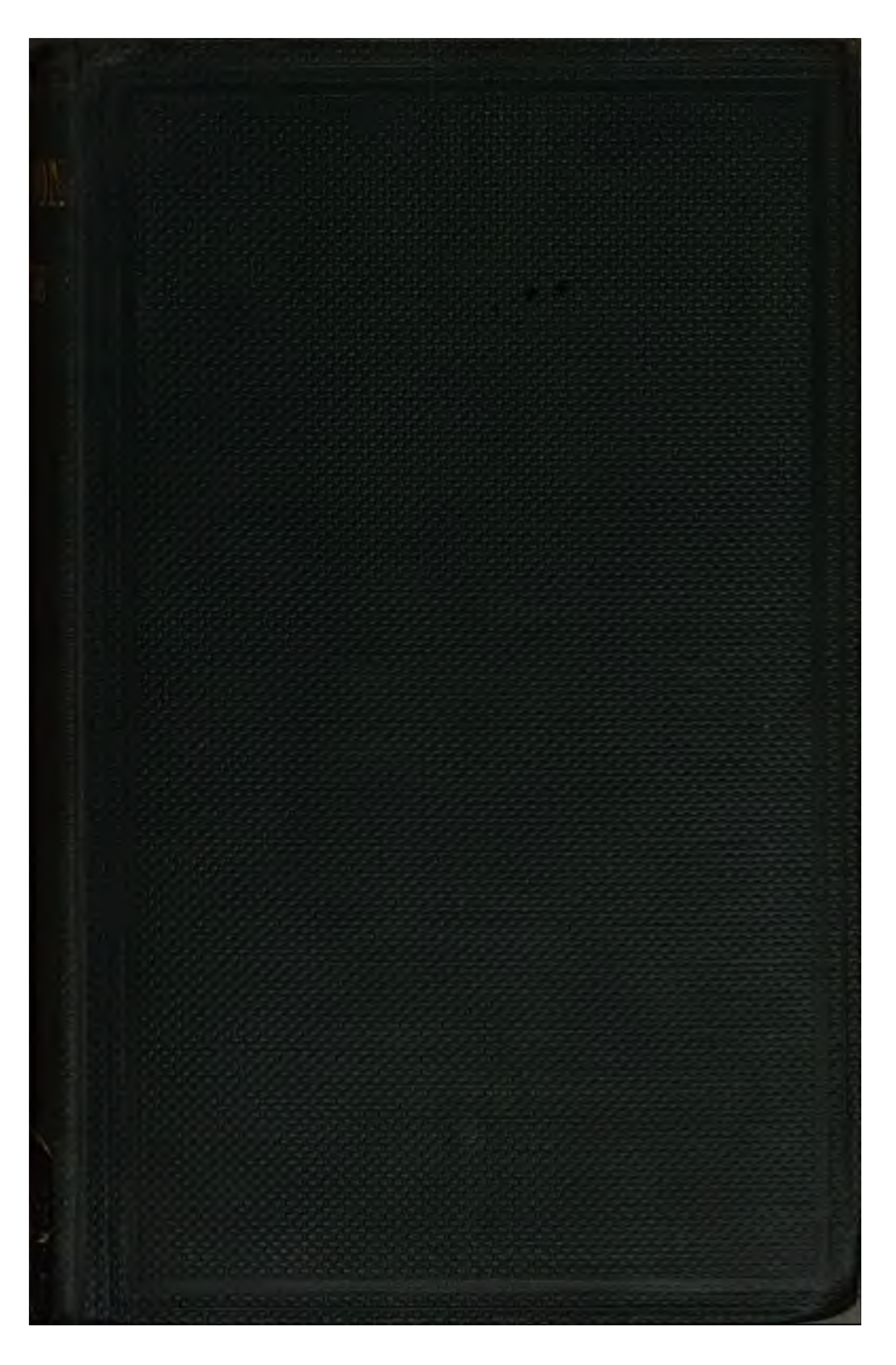
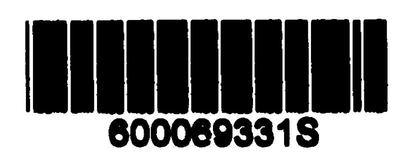
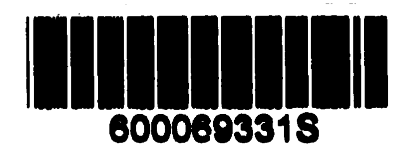
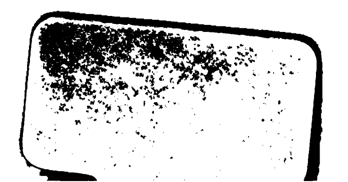
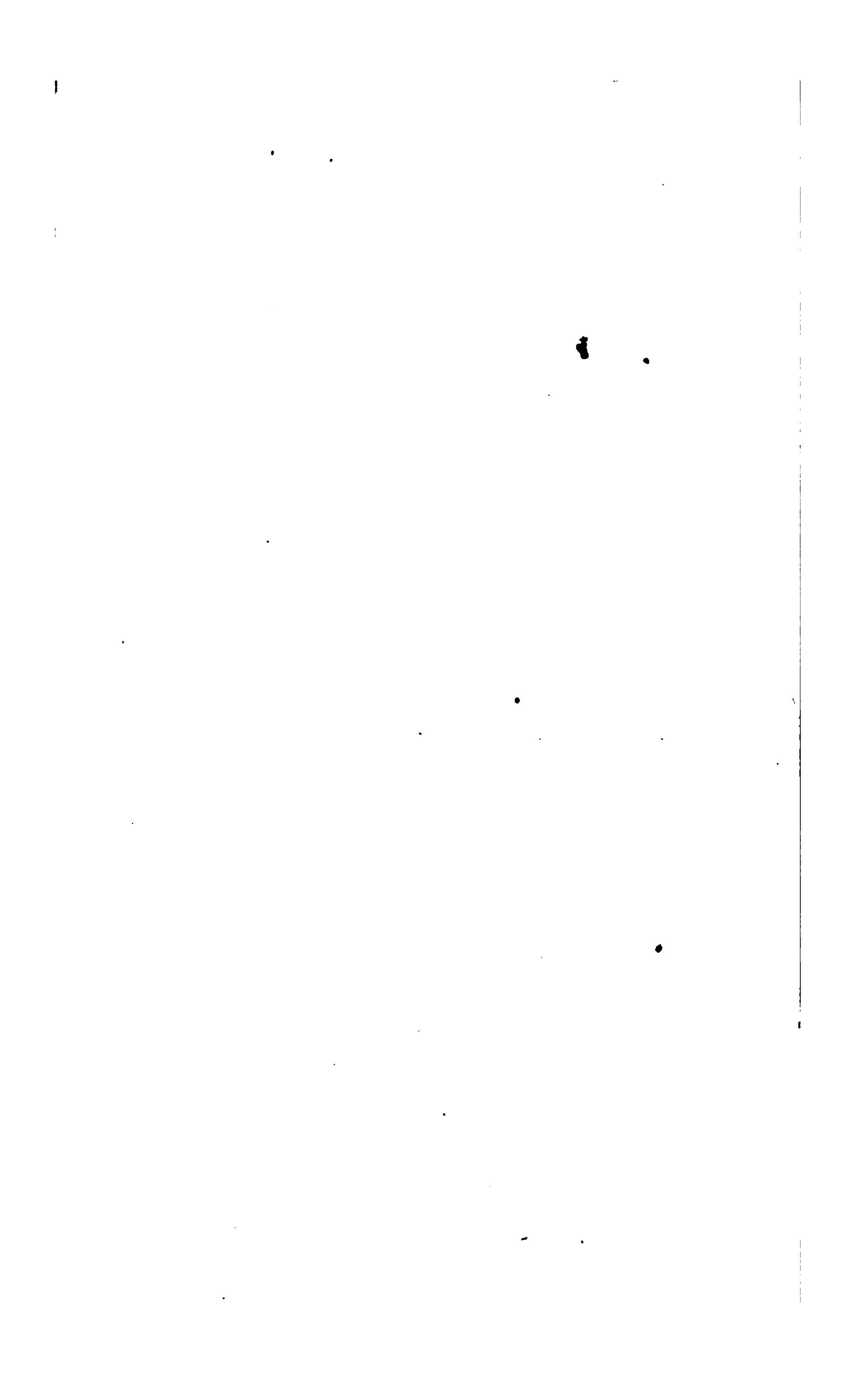



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HECKINGTON.

A NOVEL.

BY

MRS. GORE.

> Bewailing, in my chambere, all allone,
>   Despeiring of all joye or remedye,
> Foretiret of my thocht, and woe-begone!
>   Unto the windowe gin I walk in bye;
>   To see the world and folk that wend forbye;
> As, for the tyme, though I of mirthis fude
> May have no moe, to luke it dothe me gude.
>
> KING JAMES I. (1325.)

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HECKINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

"TINY does not seem to have returned in better spirits from the wedding at Clevelands.—I was in hopes, my dear, that seeing something of the world, particularly in so gay a scene, would brighten her up," said Mr. Corbet to his invalid wife, as they sat together over the cindery fire of a dark parlour, on a cheerless winter day.

"Her spirits are never high. But she enjoyed herself excessively; and a civil line

which she brought back to me from Mrs. Horsford, mentioned that in her bridesmaid's dress she really looked lovely."

"Which, if one didn't know that Mrs. Horsford's civil lines are mere flummery, would be a pleasant hearing. But I wish she had brought back, instead, a cheerful face; or was sitting chatting with us here, instead of moping in her own room."

"She is only gone to write a letter to her Aunt Enmore, my dear. Probably, to give her an account of the wedding. Tiny has seldom much to write about,—poor thing!—"

"Nearly as much as Mrs. Enmore has to answer, I suspect."

"But Tiny will have something to cheer her up, next year," added Mrs. Corbet, in whose monotonous life a year was as a day. "Edgar will then be old enough for lessons."

Mr. Corbet could not but hint that a spelling-book, and a dull child, were not exactly the objects calculated to enliven a

pretty young girl of seventeen.—But his gentle-hearted wife was not to be convinced.

"Tiny was so fond of the children!—She had never been the same girl since Alfred was taken from her hands to go to school!—"

There was some excuse for her prejudice in favour of the boys and their spelling-books. —They were her own, and the pretty young girl of seventeen only her step-daughter.

A tenderer stepmother, however, never existed; and, till six years old, Tiny not only remained ignorant that her own mother had died in child-bed; but, though two little brothers were already born from her father's second marriage, was still the spoiled child of the family. Nay, of her two parents, Mrs. Corbet was decidedly the fondest; and, but that the expected arrival of a third olive branch, rendering it desirable that Grenfield House should be kept quiet for a time, determined her father to accept for her an often-declined invitation to visit her maternal grand-

mother, in London, she would never have surmised that her "dear, dear mamma" was only a mamma by courtesy.

Not all the groundless complaints, however, which she heard uttered to the old lady by the nursemaid who had attended her from her birth, and who accompanied her to town, could persuade her to fancy herself aggrieved by the number of nurselings who crowded her nursery, and caused "poor little Miss Sophy to be so turribly put upon." Even her grandmother, who had somewhat resented her son-in-law's precipitate re-marriage (on the usual plea of wanting some one to take care of his motherless infant), was forced to admit that the care had been admirably taken.

Still, as Mrs. Corbet's young progeny was annually increasing, and her health becoming daily more infirm, it was clear that as the dimensions and income of Grenfield House did not increase with the family, the comfort of poor little Tiny was in danger; and at the

end of a two months' visit, the child had so endeared herself to Mrs. Rawdon, that she finally obtained the sanction of the Corbets to retain her as an inmate.

Still, it was the stepmother who most regretted, and longest resisted, the concession. It was only on learning from her husband that Tiny was wholly unprovided for, and that Mrs. Rawdon, if she took a fancy to her grandchild, would most likely secure her an independence, that she withdrew her opposition. Considering all she was doing to encroach upon the little girl's prospects, she must not stand in her light.

The heart of the infirm young crowder of the Grenfield House nursery was so much better than her head, that she was not likely to surmise how far greater might be the advantage to her stepchild of being reared as little Tiny, by her father's homely fireside, than as the Miss Corbet of her grandmother's formal mansion in Harley Street. Her frocks

might have displayed less embroidery; but, instead of being prematurely governessed into headaches, the child would have been tearing about the Grenfield garden, with her little brothers; and escaped many a languid, dreary hour, yearning after the caresses which, in early childhood, had softened her little heart.

For grandmamma was as cold as a stone. She had claimed the care of "poor Sophia's little girl" far more as a duty than a pleasure. Her pride, which had revolted against her daughter's derogatory marriage with a yeoman's son, revolted equally against a grandchild of her's being "put upon" in Mr. Corbet's shabby household. But she chose to bring her up in the same dry, disagreeable manner she had brought up "poor Sophia and her sister Jane;" both of whom her crotchety husband, the late Mr. Rawdon, detested, because they were girls; and whom she had not the grace to compensate by extra affection for

their father's unnatural estrangement. She seemed, indeed, almost as much out of sorts with their sex as the arrogant parent, who, because designated in his County History as "Rawdon of Heckington," resented as an injury at the hands of Providence that to "Heckington" there was no Arthur Rawdon to succeed.

All the disappointed man could do with two such unprofitable articles on his hands as a Sophia and a Jane, was to marry them early, in hopes that, at the time of his decease, an heir-male might not be wanting; and his mortification was proportionably great, when his elder girl chose to attach herself to the son of a neighbouring gentleman farmer, of small means; who, as the united ages of father and son did not amount to his own, had no means of maintaining a Miss Rawdon of Heckington in a style appropriate to her birth, even had her parents stooped to sanction so humiliating an alliance.

The marriage, therefore, was deferred, and the squire forced to content himself with matching his younger girl with a handsome and wealthy Creole, of the name of Enmore; who, within three years, rendered him the proud grandfather of two promising boys.

From that period, poor Sophia was allowed to fret away her days unmolested. Nor was it till six years after her first betrothal to Henry Corbet, that the sudden death of his father, and his accession to a small estate, enabled him to transfer his bride from the stately old mansion of Heckington to the Grenfield House, which, small and dull as it was, she regarded as a paradise on earth.

But she reached her paradise too late. Her girlhood was gone. Her health was gone. And though, on perceiving that she gave promise of increasing his posterity, "Rawdon of Heckington" executed a new will, bequeathing to her and her heirs-male the whole of his property, on condition that they successively

assumed his name and arms, the bequest was invalidated by a stipulation that, at her death, in the event of her leaving daughters only, the estate was to pass to the sons of her sister, attended with similar conditions.

She did not leave "daughters." She left but one; and it was even surmised that vexation on learning the sex of the unwelcome infant, had hastened her end. For already, the Corbets were in possession of Heckington Hall. The pompous old gentleman had died within a few months of signing his will;—frightened out of his life, as many others have been, by an operation certifying his mortality; and, in compliance with his desire that the coming heir should be born under the roof of his forefathers, poor Sophia had undergone a hasty removal to her new home, the fatigue of which unluckily accelerated the advent of a still-born son.

All satisfaction in the possession of Heckington was consequently destroyed for a time.

Nay, for a long time. Two years elapsed, and no signs of a successor to the little martyr! Old Mrs. Rawdon had taken up, with dowagerly dignity, her abode in Harley Street. Mr. Corbet had advertised Grenfield House to be let; and was devoting himself to the improvement of the fine estate to which he had succeeded. But, already, the neighbours began to surmise that he was labouring for the benefit of others;—that Mrs. Enmore and her handsome sons would succeed to Heckington Hall.

It is surprising, by the way, how much the joint-stock gossip of country neighbourhoods is enlivened by contingencies arising from the eccentricity of English wills. Scarcely a county whose dinner-parties cannot turn out their bagged fox, of some heir dispossessed, or entail created, by the caprices of a wilful, self-sufficient, or half-cracked testator.

But the dinner parties of Hertfordshire did more than discuss the event. They were sin-

cerely grieved, when, four years after the tardy marriage of the Corbets, they dispossessed themselves of the Rawdon estates, by the birth of a daughter;—Mr. Corbet to return to Grenfield House, for which he had luckily found no tenant—"poor Sophia" to take up her abode in her last home!—

So resentful, indeed, were the neighbours of old Mr. Rawdon's testamentary dispositions—for the Corbets had been gentle in their rule at Heckington, and kindly in their hospitality, —that when, little more than a twelvemonth after the decease of his wife, the widower secured a successor for poor Sophia in the youthful daughter of the curate of the parish, they not only found no fault with his selection, but affected to believe that it was solely for the sake of little Tiny he had provided her with a stepmother scarcely out of her teens.

It was only the venerable Mrs. Rawdon who resented his precipitancy. Though she and her obdurate husband had chosen to render

miserable so many years of their daughter Sophia's life, she had become "poor Sophia," now that she was in a better world; and as Henry Corbet had waited half-a-dozen years for her hand, it was clear that another half-dozen should have elapsed before he sued for the hand of another. The dowager was consequently intitled to turn her back upon the plebeian family at Grenfield House; which she could do with perfect ease, at the distance of forty miles. Heckington was deserted, and her daughter Enmore settled in Jamaica; where the valuable plantations of her husband were far more important to his interests than the English property in which his wife had only a life interest, as *locum tenens* for her elder son.

When little Tiny became her grandmother's guest in Harley Street, however, this elder son was at Eton, and his brother Willy at the Charter House: and though occasional visitors to old Mrs. Rawdon, they found her house

so much less jolly than those of their father's agent, Mr. Harman, at Wimbledon and in Bedford Square,—that their visits began late in the holidays, and ended early:—the manners and customs of dowagers and public school-boys being rarely found to dovetail.

CHAPTER II.

Tiny was just fourteen, and the heavy part of her education was over, when her grandmother died; — if life her semi-existence, without love, without cheerfulness, without intellectual pursuits, could properly be called. Mrs. Rawdon never opened a book,—never opened a heart,—was neither pious, nor resigned, nor thankful; so that when an emblazoned achievement brightened the dull front of her dingy mansion in Harley Street, no one

shed a tear but Miss Corbet's governess, who received her dismissal from the executors.—The servants, to whom, according to old custom in old families, a year's wages had been bequeathed, went on their way rejoicing.

The heart of her granddaughter, though awed and saddened by the first aspect of death, was speedily relieved by her return to Grenfield House; which, in spite of the frequent protests of Harley Street, she had always persisted in calling "home." Though a transition from the domestic comfort afforded by two thousand a year, to the privations necessitated by four hundred and a family of children, might to many girls have appeared irksome, Miss Corbet (whose pet name of Tiny had only been bestowed because, immediately after her mother's death, that of Sophia gave pain to the hearers,) was too happy to be loved and caressed, with little romping brothers climbing her knees, to discover the toughness of the

mutton, or the coarseness of the damask on which it was served.

It was summer-time; and for years, she had enjoyed the sunshine of Heaven only amidst the sooty bushes of Cavendish Square, or the platitudes of the Regent's Park;—and to have the run of a garden and paddock, without a green veil, and be called "darling" on her return, was almost sufficient happiness for Tiny.

But the cold, loveless habits in which she had been reared, had not only created a craving in her young heart for the tenderness of domestic life, but rendered her prematurely thoughtful. After a week's prodigality of rural pleasures, she saw that, in a household so contracted as that of Grenfield House, it behoved her to be useful. She became the teacher of her little brothers, and a vigilant attendant on the sick couch of poor Mrs. Corbet. The second boy, Clement, died a few months afterwards, the victim of an accident; and the

grief occasioned in the affectionate little circle by the sad event, for a time absorbed its faculties. Alfred, however, remained the charge of his stepsister; and when, three years afterwards, he was placed at a neighbouring grammar-school where he did ample credit to his tutor, Tiny discovered that, in forwarding *his* education, she had considerably advanced her own.

Such was the state of things at Grenfield at the moment of the wedding at Clevelands. Alfred was at school, Edgar still in the nursery, Mrs. Corbet a permanent fixture on the parlour sofa. Aunt Jane, now a widow, was residing in Hertford Street, May Fair; her son Arthur, already "Rawdon of Heckington," at College, and her younger, William, completing his education at Dresden. The fortune of five thousand pounds bequeathed to Miss Corbet by her grandmother, was not to come into her possession till she attained her majority; or the shabby old furniture of the Grenfield

parlour would have been renovated, and a stout cob have replaced the shambling shooting pony of her father. But an allowance of a hundred a year was assigned her, meanwhile, by Mrs. Rawdon's executor; a clever, gentlemanly solicitor, who would have doubled the amount, but that he discerned in his first short interview with his ward, that not a penny of it would be appropriated to her own use. Nor did he think it desirable that, her father being able to maintain her, she should contribute, as she desired, the remainder of her income towards the household expenses. If she should make a poor marriage, the accumulations of her minority might be important to her.

Between Grenfield House and the neighbourhood, meanwhile, there was no excess of sympathy. The Corbets had neither health nor fortune to be hospitable; and though, had their hundreds per annum been thousands, people would have felt considerable interest in

the better or worse of the feeble invalid, or had they been tens of thousands would have despatched messengers on horseback to enquire after her sick headache, Mrs. Corbet's habitual sofa, and invalid's cap and shawl, had come to be considered a bore. Once a year, was as much as anybody cared to be glad or sorry for her in a morning visit; and as Tiny was always in the schoolroom, the neighbouring squires persisted in asking after her, of her father, as his "little girl." She had never yet appeared in other than girlish attire. She had never answered their salutations without blushing and stammering. And as Grenfield House gave no dinners, and had no manor to shoot over, they were justified in regarding her as an insignificant little thing, unworthy consideration.

It was, therefore, a vast condescension on the part of the Horsfords of Clevelands, to invite her to become one of the bridesmaids of their daughter Amy, on her marriage with Sir

James Armstead. So at least thought Tiny; and, though her father was of opinion that his dear "little girl" was worthy to be Maid of Honour to Majesty itself, even Mrs. Corbet trembled at the idea of her stepdaughter, arrayed in silk attire, and bewildered by the tumult of a fashionable wedding. The gay and fashionable Horsfords, however, were not to be denied; and, as they did not think it necessary to state that Miss Corbet was invited only as a substitute, at the last moment, for a capricious niece, the fact that a beautiful bridesmaidenly costume was forwarded from Clevelands to Grenfield House, was considered a token of more than neighbourly good will.

Henry Corbet, though he had progressed into grey hairs and the rheumatism, was moved almost to tears when he saw his little girl suddenly transformed, by lace and white satin, into a young woman if not beautiful, at least strikingly pleasing; and it sorely vexed Mrs. Corbet that her boy Alfred

could not see how pretty his teacher-sister looked, when relieved from her brown holland pinafore!

But the happiest and proudest of the party was Tiny. With all the sanguine elation of girlhood she stepped into the carriage despatched for her from Clevelands. In the auspicious wedding of Sir James Armstead and Amy Horsford, the pleasantness of her life was beginning. She was going into new scenes, among new people kindly disposed towards her; in a new dress, in which she was said to look charming. What could girl wish for more?

Had Grenfield House been a subscriber to Hookham's, or Mudie's "Select Libraries," the well-read novice would have been aware that, under such circumstances, she was intitled in this, the first chapter of the first volume of her adventures, to make a conquest of some importance. An Honourable Frederick, or at the least, a baronet's son, ought to fall

to her share. But, ignorant of her privileges as a heroine, she thought herself lucky to be taken in to the wedding-breakfast by the tutor of the Master Horsfords; and at the merry ball which closed the ceremonies of the day, exulted at being invited to dance by a succession of lanky-haired striplings.

So far from finding the dark eyes of a mustachioed stranger fixed upon her in startled admiration, the only person whom she detected gazing upon her was old Dr. Ashe; who, having vaccinated poor Tiny in her babyhood, took a strong interest in the state of her complexion.

It was not, however, disappointed ambition which, while Mr. and Mrs. Corbet were discussing her the following day in the parlour, caused the head of Tiny to rest heavily upon her hand, instead of rushing at once, for the benefit of her aunt Enmore, into the details of the Clevelands' wedding. She had not heart to write about wedding favours and

wedding cake.—She was thoroughly out of spirits.

At the gay scene of the preceding day, amid the clash of the brass-band and the illuminations of the evening ball, when healths were drunk with cheers at the breakfast, and the bride at parting wept on the neck of her mother, a sense of loneliness had weighed her down. Troops of friends had rushed forward to shake hands with the lovely Amy, as, on the arm of her bridegroom, she proceeded to their travelling carriage. Hundreds of genial voices responded when the health of the new Lady Armstead was proposed. For she was the centre of attraction to a little world of her own.

But for herself, the poor little bridesmaid, what mortal cared? Had *her* marriage been in process of solemnization that winter's morning, who would have officiated as her bridesmaid,—who would have huzzaed in her honour,—who would have dried her farewell

tears ?—Mrs. Corbet, daily more infirm, thought only of her pains and aches. Her father, embarrassed in his circumstances, cared chiefly for the amount of his weekly bills. Alfred was engrossed by football and Latin grammar. Little Edgar preferred his old nurse to the sister who was to teach him to spell. In the old Slough of Despond in Harley Street, she had been forbidden to form childish friendships. Her spirited young Enmore cousins had systematically made her a butt. The Horsfords were worldly girls, who despised her as a country cousin. She was conscious of no human sympathy. She was alone—*alone* in the world!—

But was this always to be? Was she to remain thus sequestered from the friendships and acquaintanceships of life? Was she to be a perpetual nonentity; unable to take part in, or even to comprehend, such conversation as she had overheard at Clevelands;—neither very learned, nor very wise, but as

strange to her as if it had been uttered in Arabic.

She could bear it now, perhaps: because, as Mrs. Corbet often reminded her, next year little Edgar would be in want of lessons, and occupy all her time. But when Edgar, in his turn, went off like Alfred to the Aldenham grammar school and trapball, what was to become of her from morning till night at Grenfield, between her silent father and his moaning wife?

Aspiring at once to intellectual intercourse and the giddier pleasures of life, poor Tiny little knew the advantages she enjoyed in that dull, peaceful household; where not a syllable prejudicial to a fellow-creature had ever reached her ear, or an unkind word reproached her own shortcomings. What fruit of the tree of knowledge, however high-flavoured, would yield her half such refreshment as this blessed impunity!—

Experience had not yet taught her that there

was more of human kindness in the simplest phrase of her ailing stepmother, than in all the studied compliments and set smiles of the affable lady of Clevelands; whose chief occupation in life was that of throwing powdered sugar, by way of dust, into the eyes of her associates. Mrs. Horsford's cajolements had not only taken the poor girl's reason prisoner; but, aided by compassionate condolences, convinced her that her isolated existence was the subject of commiseration to the whole neighbourhood of Grenfield.

All this, it was, that caused poor Tiny to deliberate over the sheet of paper extended on her blotting-book, ere she addressed her aunt Enmore. She was at no loss to describe the beauty of Lady Armstead's Brussels veil, or the mythological devices that adorned her wedding-cake. But she scarcely knew how to express, without offence to her parents or humiliation to herself, that the invitation so often reiterated by her aunt to spend a few

weeks or even months, with her in town, would, if again repeated, be particularly acceptable.

At length, however, it was written. The letter was despatched, and answered, and Tiny's proposal of her company warmly accepted, before she had recovered her amazement at having risked so strong a measure.

In another week, she was settled under the roof of Mrs. Enmore; her father, much on the same grounds which had originally determined him to part with her in favour of her grandmother, having not only consented to the arrangement, but escorted her to town.

"You must not fret at leaving home, my dear girl," said he; "for, now you have lost Alfred, it is no longer the same place to you. But keep up your spirits, Tiny. During your absence, I shall be getting on with Edgar; and I hope to push him into two syllables, for you, by the time you return to Grenfield House."

CHAPTER III.

It was, perhaps, because Mrs. Enmore was conscious that her own offspring had superseded her niece in the inheritance seemingly apportioned to her by nature, that she so readily accepted her offered company; for she was neither a hospitable, nor an open-hearted woman. Her secretive nature rendered her averse to intimate companionship of any kind. The Rawdons of Heckington had been systematically reserved with their children.

Her late husband was so unmitigated a tyrant, that during her married life, she had been as much a slave as any nigger on the Fredville plantation; and though now completely her own mistress, the habits of mysteriousness—not to say deception—she had acquired during this long subjection, retained their mastery over her nature.

Hating to be questioned, whether about trifles or things important, she carefully refrained from questioning. But the self-control, which restricted to her eyes the curiosity usually expressed by the voice, imparted a restless, prying look to a face otherwise handsome.

To her niece, who for the last three years had been living at Grenfield between two of the most open-hearted of human beings, nothing appeared more extraordinary than the "*Pray* don't mention it again," or, "*Pray* be on your guard," which prefaced even the slightest of Mrs. Enmore's observations. She spoke in an habitual whisper, from fear of

listeners at the door; and would scarcely express an opinion that the day was cold, till the servant who was putting on coals had quitted the room.

After a few days' residence, it struck poor Tiny that Mrs. Enmore's house and habits were far less cheerful than formerly,—a change she ascribed to the absence of her noisy cousins; forgetting that a visit to aunt Enmore had afforded a pleasant escape from Harley Street and her school-room tasks; whereas she had now to compare it with a home where the name of Tiny was a household word and she scarcely knew herself as Miss Corbet.

Still, though the prim aunt, who, with the aid of hair and teeth thirty years younger than her own, preserved a false appearance of juvenility, damped all attempts at conversation, she enjoyed in Hertford Street the pleasant companionship of the large and well-chosen library of the late Mr. Enmore.

A volume or two on farriery or farming, Graham's Domestic Medicine, and the boys' school-books and Robinson Crusoe, had comprised the literary treasures of Grenfield House; and the few books she had brought from Harley Street, chiefly gaudily bound prize-books, presented to her by her grandmother or governess, had been read and re-read till both the gilding and charm were worn away. But now, she plunged unchecked into a sea of enjoyment; and aunt Enmore was never better pleased than when she found her book in hand. "Books were safe companions;" that is, with certain restrictions.

"Her niece," she hinted, "should be very cautious in talking about the works she read. Promiscuous reading was generally disapproved, and young ladies who incurred the charge of being *blue* were regarded with suspicion."

It was easy to observe the injunction; for with the exception of a flighty spinster, a

cousin of both, Mrs. Enmore's intimates consisted of a few creole families,—uninteresting, unintellectual people, whose conversation, like her own, was restricted to the discussion of the weather, and whose boudoirs, like her own, were ornamented with madrepores, shells, and corals; while the visits occasionally inflicted by the loquacious Lucretia Rawdon, were occupied by a series of guerilla skirmishes on the part of the nimble-tongued guest, and of agonised "hush, hushes!" on that of her kinswoman.

"Why, Tiny has grown quite a beauty!" cried Lucretia, the first time she installed herself by the fireside in Hertford Street, after Miss Corbet's arrival. "A thousand pities her grandmother did not do something handsomer for her! Two hundred a-year won't go far to marry a girl in these prodigal times. To be sure, poor Mrs. Rawdon had only her jointure; and her servants who kept her in leading-strings, Jane, as yours do *you*, took care

she shouldn't lay by much for the benefit of her family. They would hardly allow me a sight of the old lady during the last few years of her life, lest I should be on the look-out for a legacy. And I can't say, cousin Jane, that even your surly Mr. Harding is much civiller. This very morning, he looked as if he would have liked to shut the door in my face."

"Hush, hush!" murmured Mrs. Enmore,—glancing anxiously at the inner drawing-room, where Harding might possibly be employed in watering the hyacinths; and where her niece was busy with her books.

"But as I was saying about Tiny Corbet," resumed Miss Rawdon, changing her topic without lowering her shrill double-edged voice, "I suppose, by your establishing such a pretty girl under your roof, you intend her to become Mrs. Rawdon of Heckington?"

"Hush, hush! You don't know what you

are talking about!" again murmured poor Mrs. Enmore,—but still in vain.

"I know very well what I'm talking about; and I know what your poor mother's wishes were on the subject. But it won't do, Jane. As soon as Arthur makes his appearance in the world, you'll hear very different news of him.—It would never suit that scamp of a friend of his, Bob Horsford, to allow him to marry Tiny."

Finding both gestures and entreaties unavailing to silence the uncompromising spinster, Mrs. Enmore rose and glided across the room, intending to close the door of communication. Long before she reached it, however, Miss Corbet, with a glowing, face appeared on the threshold.

"My cousin Lucretia can scarcely intend me to hear what she is saying," she observed. "Shall I take my book to my own room, till she is gone?"

"No, my dear, by no means!" cried Miss

Rawdon, starting up and dragging her to a vacant chair by the fireside. "It will do you worlds of good, Tiny, to hear a little matter-of-fact. Forewarned is forearmed, my dear; and you'll learn more from me in a single hour, than from Jane, there, in a twelvemonth. It has been a great deal too much the habit of the Rawdons to bottle up their small beer; and you ought to be told before Arthur comes home from Oxford, to look sharp after your heart."

"You have forgotten our old Harley Street acquaintance," said Miss Corbet, who would have laughed outright, but for the manifest displeasure of her aunt; "when the visits of Arthur and Willy used to make the misery of my life. The days they occasionally spent with grandmamma always ended, on my part, in a flood of tears."

"Well, take care that the months which Arthur is coming to spend with his mamma don't end, on your part, in another flood of

tears. Arthur Rawdon's heart is as cold as a stone, and his temper as fierce as a hyæna's. 'Tis for your poor mother's sake I tell you so, Tiny,—for I loved her dearly. And so good bye, before Jane Enmore rings the bell for Harding to open the door. Don't look so frightened, child!—She has not spirit to do more than bid him, when my back is turned, say not at home to me the next time I call."

After the hurried exit of the whimsical spinster, Mrs. Enmore endeavoured to conceal her face from her niece's observation, by so vigorous an attack upon the fire, as to excuse her heightened colour when she resumed her place.

"A strange, misgoverned creature, poor Lucretia!" said she, significantly tapping her forehead; "not quite right in the upper story. There was once a talk in the family of having her shut up. But be very careful, my dear Tiny, never to mention it. If the story got

into circulation, it might do us all harm. Above all, pray never let any rambling nonsense you may hear from her, make any impression on your mind."

To the queerness of the eccentric spinster, Miss Corbet had been accustomed in her childhood. In Harley Street, the name of Rawdon had ensured her toleration; and even at Heckington, she was allowed elbow-room, just as a stag-horned old oak was permitted here and there in the park;—a privileged eyesore,—a denizen of the place,—sacred to the memory of Rawdons dead and gone.

But though it was easy to promise compliance with the injunctions of her aunt, the "impression" was already made. Sophia now discerned, or fancied she discerned why, since her arrival, Aunt Enmore had been so guarded in talking of her sons. Even to Heckington Hall, she alluded with the most circumspect reserve; and but that her elder cousin bore the name of Rawdon, Miss Corbet would have

of not repeating her opinion,)—a very artful woman, who had motives of her own in making so early a call.

Another disappointment! But before poor Tiny had time to fret over it, her better star defeated the churlishness of her aunt. On taking her solitary morning-walk, next day, in the Apsley Gardens adjoining Hertford Street, of which Mrs. Enmore had a key, she was warmly greeted by a lady, whose rich dress had from a distance attracted her attention.

Lady Armstead seemed sincerely glad to meet her little bridesmaid.

"But why did you never tell us at Clevelands, my dear Tiny," said she, "that you were coming to spend the season in town?"

"My visit to my aunt was not then settled. And I can scarcely call it spending the *season* in town; for Mrs. Enmore does not mix in society. The utmost I am likely to see of

the gay world, is from our windows in Hertford Street, rolling at a distance in its carriages along Park Lane."

Lady Armstead looked steadily for a moment into the pretty face by which this statement was made; and saw that Miss Corbet spoke in a cheerful tone, without the smallest project of fastening herself upon a fashionable friend.

"But you are not inextricably tied to the apron-strings of Aunt Enmore?" said she. —"You will surely be allowed to drive with me occasionally, or even accompany me to the opera?"

"Never having foreseen so pleasant a chance," was her frank reply, "I have no idea what my aunt, who is very precise in her notions, might decide. But I am not the less grateful for your kind suggestion."

"Let us hasten off at once to Hertford Street, then, and surprise her into acquies-

cence," said Lady Armstead, who, having known Mrs. Enmore from childhood, was aware of her impracticable nature.

"My aunt is never visible at this hour. If you will give me leave, I will make the inquiry, and let you know," rejoined Miss Corbet, conscious how little Mrs. Enmore would like to be surprised in her dressing-gown, fidgeting over her account-books.

"As you please, my dear. But you are wrong. She is far more likely to refuse, if taken at leisure. Not that I or mine are favourites with Mrs. Enmore. Arthur, whom we all knew and liked as a boy at Heckington, and who became at Eton the chum of my wild brother Bob, is, or was, or fancied himself in love with Florence; and his mother, who entertains other projects for him, and is ambitious of a ladyship for a daughter-in-law, as of any other unattainable luxury, has expressed, in anything but pleasant terms, her objection to the match."

"And so they aere forced to give it up?" said Tiny, a little surprised.

"*Ce qui est différé n'est point perdu.* Though they cannot marry to live on air, or on five hundred a year, (all the chancellor allows him, which is pretty much the same thing,) Mrs. Enmore cannot live for ever; and at *her* death, he comes into the enjoyment of Heckington."

A little ashamed that a comparative stranger should know so much more than herself of her family affairs, Miss Corbet relieved herself by observing that the engaged lovers would shortly meet, as Arthur was expected in town.

"Not at present, I fancy," rejoined Lady Armstead. "He writes word that, as soon as they tear themselves away from Paris, they are to proceed to Switzerland. I should not be much surprised if they spent next winter in Rome."

"*They?*"—reiterated the astonished Tiny;

"We seem to misunderstand each other. I was alluding to my elder cousin, Arthur, who is just about to take his degree."

"My dear good child," exclaimed her companion, stopping short for a deliberate examination of Miss Corbet's honest face, "is it possible that gutta-percha old aunt of yours has managed to keep you so completely in the dark?—Arthur Rawdon took his degree —honours, too—and made his parting bow to Oxford, more than two months ago; and after a tremendous correspondence with his "maternal," as Bob calls Mrs. Enmore, ended by starting for Paris; without boring himself with a personal interview, that would have only given rise to ill-blood and-ill language. My brother, who seems to have undertaken his bear-leading, for the family advantage, writes word that they have led a jolly life in Paris; and now, having made it too hot to hold them, they are about to refresh themselves on the cooler side of the Jungfrau."

"I can scarcely say how much you surprise me!" said Miss Corbet, not a little shocked. "But perhaps I shall astonish you in my turn, when I tell you that I was unaware of Arthur's having to wait for his mother's death for the enjoyment of his property."

"The fact took everybody by surprise, about three years ago. Your grandfather, who appears, my dear Tiny, to have been far from a wiseacre, and fancied that the whole world revolved on the pivot of Heckington, chose to make his own will rather than admit into his secrets the family-lawyer, who might have remonstrated against his morbid pride. Unluckily, law English and the Queen's English are not synonymous; and so, without intending it, or by misplacing an S in the names of Mr. and Mrs. Enmore, he contrived that his daughter, at her husband's death, should lose the enjoyment of his property; though the heir male, her son Arthur, could

not succeed to it till her own. But I am telling you what you must have heard a thousand times."

"Not once, I assure you."

"*I* heard enough of the story; for my father, who was Mr. Rawdon's bosom friend, and a witness of the will, was required to give evidence in the amicable Chancery suit which the executors were forced to institute, to bring law and equity to an understanding."

"And how was it decided?—"

"Much as in the case of that other celebrated amateur will—Thelluson's,—which is supposed to have ruined one of the finest properties in England. The Court of Chancery allows a handsome salary to an agent, to keep the place, I suppose, OUT of repair,—for poor Heckington is tumbling to pieces;—and allots a bare sufficiency to the heir, to keep him from starving."

"I thought you mentioned that Arthur was in the enjoyment of five hundred a year?"

Lady Armstead rewarded the *naïveté* of her companion by an indulgent smile.

"And so he is!—Poor fellow!—He has been victimised in succession by all his nearest relations. At this moment, as Florence knows to her cost, he has not the command of a thousand pounds:—his grandmother Rawdon having bequeathed her pickings and stealings out of the estate to a certain little Tiny Corbet; while his own father, believing that at his death he would succeed to the Heckington property, left to his youngest son his Jamaica plantations, and everything he possessed in the world."

"Not quite *every* thing. I heard my cousin Lucretia remind my aunt the other day, when she was speaking disparagingly of the West Indies, that her income was derived from thence."

"Yes—a jointure,—two thousand a year out of four. My father declares that Mr. Enmore only made so large a bid for by far

the least attractive of his friend Rawdon's daughters, as a bribe to secure Heckington to his posterity. And now, dear Tiny, having exhausted my patience and your own by these family histories, good-bye!—I see my servant waiting yonder at the gate; and one of my husband's few tiresomenesses (for which I shall have to crave your pardon if I am allowed to see you as much and as often as I wish,) is, that neither his horses nor servants must be kept waiting."

After a cordial leave-taking, the pretty bride disappeared towards her new mansion in Park Lane; and Miss Corbet, as she returned quietly homewards, resolved within herself to lose no time in ascertaining from Mrs. Enmore whether the insight she had obtained into their family affairs were a correct version, or a Horsford fable.

But no sooner was she reinstated in the dull, methodical drawing-room in Hertford Street, with the oppressive eye of her aunt

fixed on her like a leaden weight, than she became once more tongue-tied. Mrs. Enmore, when she thought proper, became inaccessible. To interrogate her on any subject which it suited her to envelope in mystery, was labour lost.

The only result, therefore, of Lady Armstead's rambling and rash confidences was, that throughout the evening, the eyes of her young friend remained fixed upon a spirited sketch, by Richmond, of her elder cousin, which adorned the room; and which, since she had overheard herself designated by her cousin Lucretia as "Mrs. Rawdon of Heckington," she had scarcely dared contemplate. Handsome, however, and manly-looking as it was, she could not reconcile to herself the idea of that fine, intelligent countenance united in holy wedlock with the flirting and flighty Florence Horsford. Altogether, her mind was thoroughly disturbed.

The moment which reveals to young people

that they have been purposely kept in the dark as to their family history, is usually a dangerous crisis. When the blind are first enabled to see, they seldom see clearly; and those who have been brought up among deceptions, have a right to infer that the deceivers entertain a mean opinion of their understanding, or, still worse, to mistrust the whole surface of life as hollow, treacherous, and unsafe.

CHAPTER IV.

INEXPERIENCED as she was, however, Tiny had already found occasion to observe how often the marriage choice is governed by the law of contraries. Was not her giddy friend Amy matched with the grave and punctual Sir James Armstead; with twenty years difference of age between them, and a thousand in character?—

No one could explain the caprice which had suddenly placed a pretty Lady Armstead at

the head of his bachelor's table in Park Lane. Either he found his autumn dreary during the official recess, at his fine old mansion in Somersetshire; or he had become sick of the interference in his establishment of his sister, Lady Brookdale, whose children were his presumptive heirs; or he fancied that his consequence would be doubled in public life by appearing at state dinners and court-fêtes with a showy wife arrayed in the family diamonds and point lace, upon his arm. And having, in the course of an electioneering canvass in Hertfordshire, renewed his acquaintance with the Horsfords of Clevelands, whom he had known in his younger days when a visitor at Heckington Hall, he fell a victim to the sweet countenance of the eldest daughter, backed by the sweet plausibilities of her mamma.

It was just such an artless face as he could wish to find waiting for him on his return from his Office, or the House of Commons; and the absence of all sentimentality

in the character of the fair Amy, which might have disappointed or disgusted a younger admirer, constituted to the practical middle-aged man, an additional charm. With little leisure for romance, the frankness with which his offer was accepted, and the readiness with which the match was concluded, inspired him with an exaggerated opinion of the good sense of the family.

Before the close of his bridal tour, however, the prattle of his pretty wife had given him a somewhat clearer insight into the manners and customs of Clevelands; and long before the close of the honeymoon, he had made up his mind that the mother-in-law who had provided her daughter with so many lessons for his subjection, should never assume in his establishment the part she ambitioned of queen-mother.

To render his quiet and dignified home a lounging house for idle Lifeguardsmen, or sporting Baronets, in the hope of securing good

partners and good matches for the younger sisters of his wife, would have been as contrary to his principles as to his taste; and, very soon after their establishment in Park Lane for the season, he made manifest his intentions.

But even on his wedding-day, the quiet, lady-like manners of Miss Corbet had attracted the attention of Sir James Armstead, as affording a charming contrast to the pretentious fashionability of his sisters-in-law; and as his original acquaintance with the Horsford family had commenced under the roof of the Rawdons of Heckington, he rejoiced to find his wife disposed to console herself for the absence of her sisters, by selecting a companion so desirable.

He called in person on Mrs. Enmore, to renew their long-neglected acquaintance; and either because she pitied him for having fallen a dupe to the Horsfords, or because the "auld lang syne" reminiscences to which he adverted, found their way to her frigid heart,

she made no objection to his proposal that Miss Corbet should be frequently spared to Lady Armstead, to whom her company would be a valuable acquisition.

From that moment, the London horizon of poor Tiny brightened. Drives, dinners, and operas were never wanting. The Horsfords were not yet in town; and Amy was overjoyed to share with a friend of her own age her pleasures and pains: the latter being represented by little friendly dinner-parties to the official colleagues of Sir James,—styled by his young wife the Conscript Fathers of Downing Street.

"I wish I found their company as edifying as you do," said Lady Armstead, while taking her coffee with Miss Corbet, one Sunday evening, after one of Sir James's "sociable dinners." "But when I used to accuse our Clevelands neighbours of talking shop,—turnpike trusts, patent ploughs, or the Union dietary,—I certainly did not expect to find in

London, a set of men as tiresome, and a jargon quite as technical. I can hardly stand it when, after prosing for an hour, as they did to-day about Friday's debate, they turn to me with a smile of conscious superiority, and simper condescendingly, 'I am sadly afraid all this is not very amusing to your ladyship!' —Amusing!"—

"But couldn't 'your ladyship' contrive to *find* amusement in their conversation?" rejoined Tiny,—taking the coffee-cup from her languid hand. "It was said in Hertfordshire, when you married, that Sir James Armstead was one of the first men in the House of Commons, and likely to rise to the first posts in the State,—which must make you very proud."

"Country neighbourhoods, my dear Tiny, are apt to view men and things through magnifying glasses. However, my husband *is* highly thought of by judges somewhat more capable of appreciating him than the makebelieve squires of our Lilliputian county."

"No treason against Hertfordshire!" exclaimed Miss Corbet, laughing.

"Then allow me to say my worst of those tedious old men who dined here to-day. That prince of bores and type of an Official who sat by you, Barton Frere, (as smooth, polished, and uninteresting as a billiard ball!) is my husband's bosom friend, and of course my *bête noire.* Because for the last thirty years he has lived with his nose on a desk, write, write, writing what nobody cares to read,—my husband calls him a valuable servant of the country, and wishes me to treat him with the highest consideration."

"I thought him very good-natured in taking so much pains to entertain a girl of my age," pleaded Miss Corbet.

"It is the very pains he takes which exasperates me," cried Lady Armstead, pettishly: "talking to one about the Opera or Park, with his thoughts evidently a thousand miles off, and his eyes looking into next year,—

just as he would take a doll out of his pocket, and dandle it to pacify a child!—"

"We are both of us children to *him*," rejoined Tiny, forgetting that the bald-headed Treasury-man was the contemporary of Sir James.

"I don't think age has much to do with it," rejoined Amy, with a heavy sigh. "But it makes my heart ache to think that official routine may in time wear down my husband to the same mechanical insipidity. In town, he is not the same man he used to be at Clevelands. Alas, alas! if he should ever grow as great a bore as the rest of his prosy colleagues!"

"Not likely!—See how they all defer to his opinion."—

"They ought,—for he is fifty times as clever. *His* conversation is not made up of a patchwork of Blue Books; nor does he fancy, like Barton Frere, that so long as his bald head performs its humdrum routine, the balance

of the State is secure. But admit that it is provoking to see a man squander his whole understanding upon politics! After pumping dry in parliament such questions as the Bank Charter, or Secondary Punishments, surely it is unnecessary to serve them up as a *réchauffée* at the dinner-table!"

"But since at Newmarket, nothing is talked of but racing, or in Leicestershire but hunting, surely it is natural that M.Ps should discuss among themselves their debates and divisions?"

"Then they have no business to marry!" retorted Lady Armstead, in a more acrimonious tone. "To own the truth, Tiny, the reason I am so much out of sorts with official life is that I had set my heart on a tour to the German baths; and Sir James informed me, this morning, that the session is to last till September, when it will be too late for the Rhine.—Think of dragging on in London till September!"

"But *must* Sir James remain in town till the close of the session?"

"To the last day!—He is wanted. The broad arrow is upon him. All winter too we must be in town;—I, who so longed for a Carnival in Rome!"

"You will manage it in time," said Miss Corbet, who, though some years younger than her friend, could not yet look upon one-and-twenty as the decline of life.

"Yes, in time!—I must take patience—the last thing one likes to take. I wish you could have seen the faces of Mrs. Warwick and Lady Brookdale (Armstead's sisters), when I said the other day that I wished with all my heart the ministry had been defeated on the Currency question, for that nothing would please me better than for my husband to be out of office."

"I dare say they forgave you, on reflecting that you wished it only to enjoy more of his company."

"Not they—they are women who seldom reflect, and never forgive. They were angry because a change of ministry would affect their own loaves and fishes.—Mrs. Warwick is wife to the Dean of C——, who is looking to a bishopric; and Lord Brookdale has a place in the Household."

"Are they kind to you, Amy?" inquired Miss Corbet, who could not, after what she had heard, ask whether they were agreeable.

"They are civil and attentive—not for my sake, but their brother's. But they cannot endure me or any one belonging to me. Mamma says they wanted their brother to form a higher connection."

"When they find you make him happy, their civility will perhaps warm into kindness."

"No, they will never like me; but so long as Armstead does, it does not signify. I am half afraid, however, that it is Lady Brookdale who has set my husband against my sisters, and Mrs. Warwick who has advised him not to let

mamma obtain a footing in the house.—He hinted as much, when remonstrating with me about that foolish speech of mine concerning the change of ministry."

"For which surely Mrs. Horsford was not answerable?"

"No, indeed. It was quite an after-thought that Florence could have accompanied us to Baden, where she would meet Arthur Rawdon; and that Carry would have been the better for a winter at Rome. Yet Armstead fancied that both projects were the suggestion of poor mamma."

It was difficult for Tiny not to remember how warmly she had heard Mrs. Horsford eulogise the kindness of her dear Amy in promising to make a foreign tour for the benefit of her sisters.

"However, it don't much matter," resumed Lady Armstead. "In September, we go down to Higham Grange; and there, at least, Armstead's time will be at his own disposal."

"And you will enjoy your rides and walks all the more for your London privations."

"Only, however, till Barton Frere and the rest of the bald-headed coots rejoin us in October, for pheasant-shooting!" said Amy, fretfully.

And as her friend perceived that she was bent upon retaining a grievance, she kept to herself her opinion that, next year, with a nursery to occupy her attention, Lady Armstead would have less leisure to pine after the perpetual gossip of her sisters, and flatteries of her mother.

It did, however, strike her as somewhat uncomplimentary that, when Sir James made his appearance in the drawing-room (and not till the carriage was announced to convey her home), he came alone. Scarcely to be wondered at, however, considering how little pains was taken by the young wife of their colleague to conciliate the good will of his friends.

She, on the contrary, without pains of any kind, had succeeded in pleasing them.

"You must ask Miss Corbet here often," said Sir James, when she was gone. "Frere and Marsham think her a very intelligent, agreeable girl."

"It will be pleasanter for *you*, my dear," added he, imprinting a marital kiss on the cheek of his pretty wife, "to have a companion of your own sex and age, while we old fogeys are prosing over the affairs of the nation. And my friends would be mortified, Amy, if, because my house has acquired a new attraction, I discontinued the hospitality they were accustomed to enjoy here when I was a bachelor."

The "intelligent and agreeable girl," meanwhile, on arriving at home, a little wearied by the peevish lamentations of Park Lane, was struck on the threshold by a pungent smell, such as had sometimes saluted her in passing the Blue Lion at Grenfield; and was consequently acceptable as a village reminiscence.

Mrs. Enmore's venerable butler had probably profited by his mistress's Sunday evening doze, to indulge in a pipe!

She was about to pass the drawing-room door, and proceed to her own room,—the hour being long past at which her aunt was accustomed to retire for the night,—when the increased vapour of tobacco determined her to open the door; and, lo! the fire was still blazing,—the lamp still on the table; and beside it sat, on one side, Mrs. Enmore, grim and perpendicular; on the other, an individual bearded like a pard, from whose garments emanated the unwonted vapours pervading the house.

She scarcely knew whether to advance or retire, for the hirsute stranger did not rise from his chair. The interview she had interrupted was perhaps private and confidential.

"My son Willy,—who arrived just after you left home," said Mrs. Enmore, perceiving that she did not recognise her cousin.

"Pray add who landed this morning at the Tower Stairs, and whose baggage is still in the Custom House!" exclaimed William Enmore, by way of apology for his travelling blouse, on perceiving into how pretty a girl Tiny Corbet had progressed, since the Harley Street days when he used to fasten squibs and crackers to the leg of her school-room table.

And as, still without rising, he tendered her his hand, Miss Corbet, in order to prove her forgiveness of former injuries, shook it heartily.

"You are wonderfully grown, Tiny," he added, after extending his rough arm, and dragging forward a chair for her by his side. "You promised to be a stunted little thing!—You are quite an agreeable surprise!"—

"Surprise for surprise, Willy! *You* are the last person I expected to find here," answered Miss Corbet, amused by the contrast between

her cousin's uncouth dress and manners, and the artificial formality of the circle she had just quitted.

"So my mother has been telling me. But she did not, like you, add that the surprise was by any means agreeable. Her invitations to her second son, never very urgent, ought to have been enhanced of late by the information that I had so pretty a cousin residing under her roof."

"As you had announced your intention of remaining in Germany till next autumn," replied his mother, "there seemed no great occasion to acquaint you with what was passing in Hertford Street."

"Because, before next autumn, I scarcely hoped to imbibe sufficient High Dutch to qualify me for diplomatic preferment. But as I learn from Harman's letters that I am much more wanted among the sugar-canes at Fredville, than for an apprenticeship in the F. O., if you have any regard for your jointure,

mother, you will approve of my change of plans."

"*Plans!*"—muttered the thin lips of Mrs. Enmore, to intimate that the conduct of her son was actuated only by caprice.

"Yes,—*plans*. I should, in fact, have sailed for Jamaica by the last West-India mail, mother, had not a well-meaning friend written me word of Arthur's unexpected departure for the continent. The representative of the House of Rawdon of Heckington being otherwise disposed of, I was in hopes you would extend a few days' hospitality to your pariah, on the eve of his exile."

Mrs. Enmore was upon tenter-hooks. It was wormwood to her to have the family feuds she had been so long endeavouring to conceal from her niece, thus recklessly unveiled; and the habits of the house had been so disturbed by Willy's arrival, that late as was the hour, the ear of old Harding might still be within reach of the keyhole!

"At all events, Willy," said she, "let us adjourn till to-morrow our further discussions. We are all thoroughly knocked up."

The traveller made no objection. But for full two hours after the family had retired to rest, Miss Corbet heard the new comer rattling the furniture, and pacing the room over her own, with most independent disregard to the repose of his cohabitants. The fumes of tobacco, which before exhaled only from his garments and person, now clearly intimated that he was solacing himself for his chilly reception by a pipe.

Miss Corbet was thoroughly astonished. Since her discovery, at six years old, that her father's loving wife was only her stepmother, she had never felt more surprised than that Mrs. Enmore should have been so close with her concerning the disunion between her sons; or that either of them should venture to set the rules of that methodical mansion so thoroughly at defiance:—braving not only her

tyrannical aunt, but her aunt's besetting tyrant, old Harding. At one o'clock in the morning, the portly Major Domo had to wheeze up to the third floor with cans of hot water; and was able to report on the morrow in the housekeeper's room, that Mr. William had endangered the safety of the family by the rash and unprincipled act of smoking, not under the canopy of heaven, but that of his French bed!—

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. Enmore, whose movements were as exact as those of a chronometer, made her appearance next morning, at the breakfast-table, twenty minutes before her usual time; with the laudable view of preventing a *tête-à-tête* between the cousins.

But she might have spared the hurry which caused her juvenile "front" to be put on a little awry. For though Tiny was still loitering over her toilet, less with a view to

unusual beautification than because conscious that her aunt would be better pleased if Willy poured out his own tea than that she should assist in the concoction,—another "cousin" had usurped her place at the table. When the lady of the house rustled in, *there* sat Lucretia Rawdon;—having laid aside her bonnet and shawl, to make herself completely at home.

"Why don't you thank me, Jane," said she, "for having procured you a sight of your Hopeful? Willy would have been off straight to the land of green-ginger and yellow-fever, my dear, if I hadn't given poor Abel a hint that Cain was out on his travels!"

The indignant old lady, who scarcely needed this certification that Lucretia was the "well-meaning friend" who had so officiously interfered in her family arrangements, would have perhaps been betrayed for once in her life into a rash rejoinder, but that Tiny, who had heard the stealthy footsteps of her aunt

descend the stairs, having now entered the room, was too noisily greeted, both by her kinswoman and cousin, for the reproof to be audible.

"Let me look at you by daylight, Tiny," cried Willy, snatching her hand, but still not discontinuing the munching of his dry toast. —"A good honest English complexion!" he added, after a deliberate survey, which certainly did not tend to diminish its brilliancy; "White and red, that scorn to keep the secrets of the heart, to which they act as interpreter."

"Though Cousin Jane is always taxing me with idle talking and idle writing," interposed Lucretia, without ceding an inch of the place she had usurped at the breakfast-table on the arrival of her formidable hostess, "admit, my dear Willy, that I said not a word of Tiny Corbet's roses and lilies, to accelerate your visit to London?"

At this insinuation, Mrs. Enmore plunged

her spoon into the Dundee marmalade, as viciously as if to alleviate her irritation.

"It would have been too much to relate in one and the same despatch concerning the attractions of Hertford Street, that Arthur was absent, and so charming a substitute arrived in his place," replied the Dresden student. "But that you brought me here, on any pretext, Lucretia, my angel, I am prepared to remember to the end of my days, in Guava jelly and sour pine-apples."

In hopes to pacify the ire which Mrs. Enmore was at no pains to disguise, the offending spinster proceeded to inquire of her *protégé* why he did not endeavour to convert the itinerant German artist, in whose gear he had chosen to present himself, into an Englishman of better degree; and on learning that his luggage was still unextricated from the Custom House, she offered to go in search of it herself.

"A million of thanks, good old soul!" was

his cool rejoinder. "But being a most despotic master, I find it safer to be my own servant. I shall be off to the city as soon as breakfast is over."

"At least let me bear you company in your cab, Willy," she persisted. "I have still a great deal, my dear boy, to tell you."

"Not half so much as I have to reflect upon, my lovely Lu. Besides, as sugars are falling, I mean to go by the Bus."

"Why not say, in half the number of words, that you don't want me?"

"Because, though I am come from the country of plain-dealing and plain-speaking," he retaliated, rising and throwing his napkin on the table, "I am fully aware that, in London, politeness is as imperative as one of the assessed taxes; particularly between the months of May and July, when parliament is sitting, and truthtelling an exciseable commodity. *Leben sie wohl!* therefore, my kind friend; and don't, if you value my cousinly

affection, pull caps or wigs with my lady-mother, after my departure."

Lucretia, however, took care not to be left behind. She had not courage to defy the storm already growling in the breast of the outraged Mrs. Enmore.

Even her niece looked forward with awe to a *tête-à-tête* with the ruffled parent. But she did not know her aunt. Like the leaden soldiers, which, on being overturned, spontaneously right themselves, she had become as composed as ever, before her Teutonised son managed to reach as far as the corner of Park Lane.

When Tiny proffered her assistance in removing some books and boxes from a small library on the ground-floor, which Mrs. Enmore proposed to devote to the use of Willy—probably to leave him no pretext for quartering himself and his meerschaum in the drawing-room,—her aid was graciously declined.

"I need not trouble you, my dear," said her aunt; "Harding and I can manage it very well between us. If Lady Armstead should call for you this morning, (as I think you told me she intended,) there is nothing to prevent your driving out with her; or even dining in Park Lane, if invited."

She was *not* invited; the Armsteads being otherwise engaged. Nor, had the considerate Amy been ever so desirous of Tiny's company, would she have interfered to break up a family circle so exciting to her curiosity as the one recently united in Hertford Street.

"I don't know Willy Enmore," said she, after receiving an account of his arrival:—"that is, I have never seen him since, being nearly of an age, we used to play together at puss-in-the-corner, at Heckington. But I have heard a great deal of him from Arthur—"

"A great deal of good, I hope?"

"As good as could be expected, considering

that they hate each other as intensely as the first-created brothers. I should not be surprised however, if Arthur were most in fault. *He* takes after his Creole father, who was as handsome and ferocious as a tiger. His brother, I have heard, inherits the lymphatic coolness of the Rawdons. But with the contrariety so often observed in human preferences, the quiet boy was always the darling of his passionate father;—the tiger's whelp, of your aunt."

"Which explains Lucretia Rawdon's hints this morning concerning unjust favouritism!"—

"Not *hints*, dear Tiny; unless the spiteful old maid talks very differently to her family, and to the rest of the world. I have no doubt she accused Mrs. Enmore, in the plainest English, of not daring to shelter her younger son, had Arthur been within reach."

Miss Corbet could scarcely deny the charge.

"One of the reasons, assigned for her cold-

ness to Master Abel," continued Lady Armstead, "is that the defunct tiger, when he found the Rawdon estates were to descend to his elder son, made a will in favour of Willy, bequeathing him the Fredville plantation; which, till West India property of all kinds went to what Bob calls 'immortal smash,' was nearly as valuable as Heckington. As it is, Willy is in enjoyment of *his* fortune. Whereas Cain has still to wait."

"But why should my aunt resent against her son the terms of his father's will?"

"Because she is the sort of cold-blooded despot, (far worse to deal with, my dear Tiny, than the hottest-headed tyrant!) who cannot bear that any one belonging to her should be independent. She is fond of *you*, I suspect, only because you are a quiet little Guinea-pig who dare not say her nay."

"She will have a great many nays said to her, I am afraid, by her wilful son!"—said Miss Corbet, gravely. "The peaceful days of Hertford

Street are at an end. I am almost inclined to write to papa, and beg him to fetch me back to Grenfield House—"

"To relapse into the Sleeping Beauty in the wood?—No, no, Tiny!—Don't be such a little coward!—Take your courage between your teeth, and sit by, while the others fight it out. At Grenfield, my dear, you are only in the way!"

"I begin to think I am in the way, every where," replied Miss Corbet, with a desponding sigh. "I have often fancied that children whose mothers die in their infancy, had best be shut up with them in the coffin!—I am wicked, however, to say so," she added,—tears gushing into her eyes, "for never had poor girl a better father, or kinder stepmother, than I have."

"At all events," rejoined Amy, as at that moment they stopped at Mrs. Enmore's door, "don't choose a mother-in-law out of *this* house, Tiny. I would as soon settle for life

under the shadow of an iceberg, as under the wing of Mrs. Enmore."

But either the iceberg was melting, or Mrs. Enmore, like a horticulturist who, to determine the nature of the flowers and fruit of a new plant, exposes it to artificial warmth, was just then unusually gracious. Her son and niece scarcely knew what to make of her. The family-dinner passed off almost cheerfully.

Before it was quite over, however, Willy began to ask himself whether the unusual candour of his mother might not be a wile, purporting to throw him off his guard; like the gold displayed by sharpers to dazzle the eyes of some intended dupe.

A child systematically deceived by its parents is seldom very ingenuous; but adopts the French adage, "*A trompeur, trompeur et demi.*" Neither of the young Enmores was in the habit of placing his mother in his confidence. Instead, therefore, of disclosing, as

she expected, the programme of his Jamaica expedition, he began recounting as much as it was desirable to relate of his life at Dresden; —astonishing his pretty cousin by quaint pictures of the mingled courtliness and boorishness of the Saxon Athens.

"My mother, you are to know," said he, as if wholly overlooking the presence of Mrs. Enmore, "sent me, two years ago, to Germany, on pretence of completing my diplomatic education. As if any spot on the face of the devil's earth were calculated for the purpose like Paris;—Paris, which is capable of smoothing the tongue of a Caliban, and converting a Thug into a Chesterfield. Whereas the earnestness of German nature and German language resemble a ploughshare, endeavouring to fence down a Damascus blade."

"If such were your opinion, why not remonstrate?" inquired Mrs. Enmore. "You never suggested the advantages to be secured by a sojourn in France."

"Because I knew that your real object was anything but the one assigned. Lucretia Rawdon informed me, long before I started for the Elbe, that you were suffering from the prevailing monomania that mastery of the German language is the only stepping-stone to preferment; that you were perpetually citing the number of adventurers who have become top-sawyers, by trading on that very small capital:—German being as much the Court language of the house of Hanover, as French of our Norman kings."

"But what pretension have *my* sons to become courtiers at all?" said his mother almost grinding her teeth.

"What *right* you mean,—any one may *pretend* to any thing. But even diplomacy, mother, the career you chalked out for me, is not that of a snob. As an Attaché or Secretary of Legation, the son of Enmore the planter would be nearly as much out of place as if a Gentlemen Usher, or Equerry."

"The son of Enmore the planter, perhaps. But not the descendant of the Rawdons of Heckington. Your grandfather's brother, Sir Henry Rawdon, was minister at Berlin."

"And my grandfather's sister married an Irish peer," retorted Willy; "which, though it turned the heads of the family, does not qualify her grandnephew for the Irish peerage, or prevent us from being very insignificant people."

Mrs. Enmore glanced nervously at the door. If Harding should be there, on pretence of replenishing the claret jug!

"In short," he resumed, "I knew you were much too prudent to thrust me into a profession, which for the first half-dozen years is unremunerative; and for the rest of one's life, (unless one has a handle to one's name,) a mere dead letter. A William Enmore, Esq., even with the talents of Gentz or Talleyrand, would always be pooh-poohed in Downing Street."

"I should have hoped," said his mother, bitterly, "that an income like yours, would have placed you above mere mercenary considerations. An attaché, though unpaid, enjoys a brilliant position at foreign courts."

"As a dangler at *fetes* and galas, perhaps; —as a fraction of the gimcrackery of social life!—But our Dresden phrenologists would have apprised you, mother, that in place of the bump of veneration indispensable to a courtier or diplomat, *my* cranium exhibits a cavity. A royal antechamber would be as insupportable to me as an ambassador's *Kanzlei*. As to the princely income I am shortly to derive from my sugar and rum—(I am opening in the grocery line, Tiny, will you give me your dear little custom?)—I intend to devote it to the establishment of a cheerful bachelor home; where I may smoke my meerschaum in the drawing-room, and laugh in my chimney-corner with my friends Henry Heine and John Paul."

Concluding these Germans friends, of whom she heard for the first time, to be two of his loose student companions, Mrs. Enmore was ineffably disgusted. But true to her new system of conciliation, she was about to say that she should be very happy to see them to dinner, if they happened to be in town, when her son, whose spirits were unusually excited by a slight excess of Bass, and the smiling face of his young cousin, resumed his rambling babble.

"Don't fancy, however, mother, that I mean to be a Robinson Crusoe; though my old sledging-cloak hanging in the hall, seems to accuse me of going clothed in the skins of beasts. You are in no great haste I am told for a daughter-in-law and grandchildren, to put your juvenile curls out of countenance. I have heard, and with some satisfaction, of your snubbing Arthur in his flirtations. But be warned that your younger torment has too much of his father's tropical blood in his veins, to be parent-pecked in such matters. When

I have once chosen my Joan, my Joan she shall be,—whether I find her picking grapes in a Rhenish vineyard,—or mincing her words at a Belgravian tea-fight,—or bearing patiently with my boorish egotism in Hertford Street, May Fair."

But for the last clause of his rhodomontade, Mrs. Enmore would have preserved her composure. But so bold a thrust was too much for her; and though Miss Corbet's strawberries lay untasted on her plate, she received at once the masonic signal which serves to transport ladies from the dessert-table to the drawing-room. Instead, however, of the explosion of wrath for which Tiny had prepared herself the moment they were alone, the first question of her aunt regarded Lady Armstead, and the Horsfords.

"You have, I am sure, too much discretion, Tiny," said she, "to talk to your friends in Park Lane of Willy's eccentric habits, or reckless assertions"—

But before she could conclude her exhortation, Willy himself was in the room.

"Don't expect me, mother," said he, audaciously encircling her waist, ere she could take possession of her stately arm-chair, "to indulge in the deplorable Great Britain-ism of finishing my dinner alone. You must either see me through my claret, or allow me to share your coffee. Tiny, dear, can't you give a poor fellow a little music to take the taste of maternal lectures out of his ears?"

"The best music I am able to afford you is so *very* little," replied his cousin, "that it would scarcely satisfy a person rendered fastidious by long residence in Germany. I have had no master, Willy,—scarcely what could be called a piano,—since we parted in Harley Street."

"Havn't you?—Bravo! Then there's hope that you still play and sing like a child. Except in theatres or concerts, I detest elaborate music. Half the female voices one hears are worn threadbare by over work. Give me

only some of the dear old things I used to love as a boy, before I was Beethovened and Mendelsohned out of my senses."

Miss Corbet still betrayed reluctance; less because ashamed of her want of proficiency than because of the stern displeasure contracting the brow of her aunt.

"Allow me to encourage you by firing the first shot!" cried Willy, coolly taking possession of his mother's favourite chair.—"Shall it be a scene from Oberon?—Or will you please to have a *Volks-Lied?*"

Before she could answer, he burst into a touching ballad of Uhland, in a rich mellow baritone, that could well dispense with instrumental accompaniments. It was impossible to sing with greater feeling or more perfect intonation. Even Mrs. Enmore, unused as she was to the melting mood, was touched by that exquisite melody; and though Tiny understood not a word of the language it served to interpret, she could not withdraw her eyes

or ears from her gifted cousin. Fairly captivated, she no longer thought him uncouth or scampish-looking; and her rapt attention was even more gratifying than his mother's unexpected *encore*.

Like other popular performers, he complied with the call by favouring them with a new song,—a lighter strain purporting to provoke mirth instead of tears. Tiny thought she had never heard anything half so joyous as the gay *refrain* which, he vainly protested, required a chorus of *Burschen* to do it justice.

But how, after so charming a performance, was she to inflict upon him the tiresome old pieces and obsolete valses of Strauss, which composed her stock? Unwilling alike to refuse or comply, it was, indeed, relief when, after a third ballad (a French one, "*Marthe la Brune,*" selected in consideration of his cousin's ignorance of German)—Willy started up, and expressing a fear that he was

already late, produced from his pocket a play-bill and stall ticket for the Olympic theatre.

"I'm glad to find that my loving country-men have at last got an actor," said he, as he was leaving the room. "And I must make haste and get a glimpse of this wonderful Robson before I go nigger-driving; for though I arrived in town with every intention of spunging upon my mother for a few weeks, I see by the grumphiness of her countenance that it will be wiser to limit my visit in Hertford Street to half as many days!"—

CHAPTER VI.

The weeks thus prospectively announced by Willy as the limit of his visit, became doubled; and still, he remained his mother's guest. Perhaps, because he derived pleasure from the German lessons he was giving to his cousin; perhaps, because having trimmed his beard and transferred his smoking to the Travellers, he wished to enjoy the benefit of the sacrifice. But it was certainly not because he thought his company acceptable to the

parent whom in her absence he usually denominated as "the elderly party."

"No need to be so fidgety about my staying a few weeks longer," said he, one day, after luncheon, when Mrs. Enmore had expressed some vague curiosity concerning the sailing of the West India mails. "I am forced, you see, mother, to make the most of my opportunity. Another year, I shall be no longer master of the situation. Arthur will be the man in possession. One can't expect him to bear-lead that vagabond, Bob Horsford, during a *second* continental tour."

"How can you possibly suppose, Willy, that I want you gone!" said she, in a voice that belied her words; for that very morning, old Harding had stated to her in a private audience, that if the visit were again prolonged, he should be under the necessity of depriving her of his valuable services; "Master William's rackety ways having thoroughly upset the house."

"I *do* suppose it, mother. Though you really oughtn't; for by idling away another month in London, I should avoid the hurricane season. And you well know that, more than once, hurricanes have shaved the poor Fredville Plantation as bare as my hand."

"The greater the chance that it will not again be visited," replied Mrs. Enmore, with the cool computation of an actuary.

"And I can assure and promise you, my best of parents," resumed the dauntless Willy, "that you have nothing to fear from the residence of your son and niece under the same roof. Tiny goes with Lady Armstead to balls and operas, where she makes grand acquaintance, and learns to look down upon her ragged colt of a cousin; while I, believe me, prefer the homeliest milkmaid tripping on the banks of the Elbe, to the finest London lady, with all her frills and fribbledom!—To make your blessed old mind easy, dear mamma, know that I would not marry a princess of the Blood, if

only half so stupid about conjugating her verbs, as our poor little Tiny."

Whether these sarcasms proved satisfactory or unsatisfactory to the lady of the house, to his cousin they were far from agreeable. She thought him both uncivil and unkind; and when Florence and Carry Horsford entreated her to bring Mr. Enmore some day to walk in the Apsley Gardens, that they might personally investigate his resemblance to his brother Arthur, she assured them not only that Mrs. Enmore would disapprove of such a proceeding, but that her German tutor was unworthy their interest. "They would probably decide him to be ill-dressed, ill-looking, and ill-bred." Poor little Tiny!—

"Sir James always calls you the Mirror of Truth, my dear," exclaimed Sir James's wife, shortly afterwards, when Miss Corbet, on entering her dressing-room, found her alone. "Yet after all, you are as sad a hypocrite as the rest of us. You refused to bring your cousin to the

Gardens, at the entreaty of Flo. and Carry, because 'my aunt' disapproves of your walking out together."

"And so, believe me, she does."

"And you described him to *me*, as a sort of hairy monster, smelling of tobacco, and costumed like a chorus-singer in the Freischutz."

"I told you that he looked quite unlike a London man."

"Then who, pray, was the well-dressed, handsome young stranger, on whose arm you were espied, last evening, by Barton Frere; as he was driving at the rate of twelve miles an hour, to join one of the love-feasts of the saintly Lady Hassock, who gives fashionable dinner-parties after presiding at her servants' family-prayers?"

"The handsome young stranger was Willy; who, having arrived late from the country, and encountered the footman on his way to the Gardens to escort me home, saw fit to take his place."

"And when is to be the happy day, Tiny?"

"*What* happy day?" naïvely inquired Miss Corbet, who was looking forward only to the dreary one fixed for her cousin's departure.

"Don't play at artlessness, my dear child; you perfectly understand me. If two young lovers, on the verge of years of discretion, spending the midsummer-month together under the roof of a cross old mother, are not driven into matrimony by her setting her face against it, the world's at an end!—"

"If you did but know how completely you are mistaken!" rejoined Miss Corbet, looking more distressed than embarrassed.

"Is there really no matrimony in the case? Then the young gentleman is greatly to blame. Such a couple, such a mother, and such a position, as Barton Frere justly observes, would make the fortune of an *Opéra Comique*."

It was not till tears actually flowed from the eyes of her young friend, that Lady Arm-

stead desisted from attacks which, like most of her conversation, "meant nothing." But Tiny happened to be peculiarly sensitive on the subject of the walk so unluckily detected by the Treasury spy. It was the only confidential interview she had ever enjoyed with her cousin; and had left them, as it found them, friends.—At seventeen, something more is expected from a furtive *tête-à-tête*.

Though startled to find him waiting for her at the gate of the gardens, she had expressed only delight at seeing him again; for his unexplained absence throughout the day, and even from the dinner-table, had rendered Mrs. Enmore sullen, and herself anxious. His habits were usually as punctual as Harding's almost military exactitude could desire; and the deviation was unaccountable.

"Where do you think I have been, dear Tiny?" whispered he, drawing her arm under his; and, instead of directing her steps towards Hertford Street, coolly proceeding into the

park, which the rising dew and fragrant foliage rendered peculiarly inviting.

"To Richmond, perhaps,—or Greenwich?"

"You are not talking to your cousin Arthur. *I* am not a swell. *I* do not frequent fashionable haunts. No, no!—I have been spending the day in the very spot where I first beheld a certain little white-frocked cousin yclept Sophia Corbet."

"Heckington?"

"Heckington."

"How I wish I had been with you!"

"Not half so much as I do. It would have been having a sister by my side who enjoyed and deplored the whole thing with precisely my own feelings."

And the adopted sister's arm was kindly, if not tenderly, pressed to his side.

"You don't remember the day, Tiny, when we were first there together? You were too young for anything to make an impression on you. But *I* recollect it as if it were yesterday.

I suppose I must have been about twelve years old, for we were just landed from the West Indies; and it was the first specimen I ever saw of an English home—English verdure —English flowers—English fruits."

"And then it was Heckington,—the dear old family seat!—"

"Don't take it in that light, Tiny, or I won't tell you another word!—'Tis that very Rawdon-of-Heckingtonism which has undone our family;—making fools of us, or worse, from one generation to another. That name—that place—and the associations connected with them, caused my wrong-headed old grandfather to hate his daughters, and your mother and mine to detest each other, just as Arthur and I do now; besides rendering the lives of my parents—Well, well! perhaps we had better say no more about it!"

"Yes, *do*,—pray do!" said Miss Corbet, with such earnest unction that it would have been difficult to refuse.

"As to my parents, then, since you choose me to be so undutifully explicit, their union, arising on both sides from motives of interest, was thoroughly unhappy. — No two people were ever less suited to each other. My father's blood was lava — my mother's snow-water. She trembled before *him* as a tyrant —*he* shuddered at *her* as an intractable mule. And between the two sisters there was quite as little affection. My grandfather, displeased at your mother's choice, had promised mine that her eldest son should become Rawdon of Heckington; and when my aunt Sophia at length married, and gave promise of an heir, my father was furious, and carried off his wife and sons to Jamaica, where he led us the life of—no matter what! Even when your poor mother died, and the birth of a certain little Tiny rendered the previous heir-presumptive Rawdon of Heckington, he was not pacified. My foolish mother, regarding that possession as

secondary only to the British empire, could talk or think of nothing else; and chose to discover that the climate of the West Indies was hurrying her to the grave."

"But that was not the fault of poor Heckington?" pleaded Miss Corbet.

"Heckington was the grain of mustard-seed which produced the mighty evil. Arthur and I loved each other dearly, till my mother began to call him by his new name, and defer to him far more than to my father; and my grandfather's absurd will imparted an altered value to every member of the family. Dreadful to think of—is it not, Tiny?—that false pride and lucre-love should be able to strengthen or weaken the holiest ties of blood!"

"They are *not*—they are *not!*"—cried Miss Corbet, with honest indignation. "*My* father is a very poor man. But the acquisition of millions would not influence by the worth of a doit his affection for his wife or child."

"Wait till he is tried, my dear little enthusiast. But whether Mr. Corbet be either Saint or Philosopher, *my* father was *not*. His chief reason for remaining in Jamaica years and years after his affairs would have been seriously benefited by a visit to England, was to mortify his wife by proving his indifference to Heckington. At last, the state of her health rendered a change of climate indispensable: and then it was, Tiny, that, about a week after our landing, you came with Grandmamma Rawdon to visit us;—a poor prim little thing, whom we tormented as children do a moth, only because of its helplessness."

"How afraid of you all I was. I don't know which I feared most, the scorpions and snakes preserved in spirits, which you brought with you as specimens of West Indian produce; or Mr. Enmore, who, after pinching my ear, bade me be a good girl and not cry; or his sons, who wished for nothing better than to make me cry from morning till night."

"As far as my own feelings were concerned, Tiny, I promise you I was charmed with my little cousin, who was the nearest thing to a sister I had ever been able to call my own; till one unlucky day, as I was reading Philip Quarll in a window-seat, and while my father, and mother, and the dowager were enjoying the domestic bliss which is as full of spites and squabbles as the Tower of London of small arms, I overheard my grandmother declare that her 'dear Sophia's predilection for Heckington had been the cause of her untimely death; and that it was hard upon poor little Tiny to be stripped of her inheritance in her cradle.' My good mother drew up, looking Nemesis-like and awful, just as we have often seen her. But when her husband saw her disposed to be pugnacious, he, of course, took the opposite side. 'It *is* hard on the poor little girl,' said he. 'But we must make her amends by marrying her to Arthur. Here's my hand upon it, Mrs. Raw-

don, that Tiny shall be Mrs. Rawdon of Heckington.'"

Miss Corbet could not repress a start of surprise, or a cry of indignation.

"He spoke so authoritatively, Tiny (he never spoke otherwise), that from that day I looked upon you as my sister-in-law, as much as upon him as a parent. I did not love you the better for it; nor Arthur neither. You know the rest; how intensely I plagued you, and how, when my grandmother died, everybody was surprised that she had not scraped together more than five thousand pounds for your benefit, simply because she thought you provided for. We boys were then at school. You went to reside with your father; and not very long afterwards, mine was taken from us."

"Just as you were all happily established."

"Established, but not happily. Arthur, the grandee of the family, was at Eton, and the scrub, my unworthy self, at Charter

House. But a new source of family grievances had arisen. My father, a just man, though a violent, had not chosen that one of his two sons should monopolise the fortunes of the family; and believing young Rawdon of Heckington to be nobly provided for, bequeathed to poor Willy Enmore his West Indian estates."

"A very equitable distribution."

"It seemed so. But when the lawyers came to handle his will, and my grandfather's, it appeared that my mother's jointure was assessed on the Fredville Plantation; and that, except a small annuity with which it was encumbered in her favour, the income of the Heckington estate was to be tied up till her death. No one can reside there till she dies; and Arthur has at present nothing but what the Elderly Party is pleased to allow him."

"But grandpapa never could have intended this?"

"Who can say?—He appears to have been

a pompous old gentleman, enamoured of his family consequence; and may have been desirous of creating a great estate. At all events, as my mother was at that period of her life a professed invalid, he did not calculate on her surviving his robust son-in-law; or his son-in-law's selection of the younger of his whelps to succeed to his West India property."

"Very unfortunate for Arthur!—"

"Very unfortunate for us all. The ill-blood thus created, will never be purified. We are an unamiable family, Tiny;—all but that good little Mrs. Rawdon of Heckington, who, rich or poor, has never exhibited the cloven foot."

"But could you not share with your brother the property of your father?"

"Silly child! Have I yet entered into possession of it? For two months to come, I am not of age. The object of my Jamaica expedition is to examine the nature and extent of my property, and make arrangements on the spot with my father's agents and ex-

ecutors, Harman and Co. But you don't know Arthur, or myself, if you think he would lightly accept a benefaction; or that I would lightly tender one likely to be refused. Nor can it enter into the conception of that tender little nature of yours, how much envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness have been engendered between us, by my mother's different estimation of the proud pauper of Heckington, and the rich young sugar-monger. The Elderly Party has done her best to make us hate each other, as Lucretia says, like Cain and Abel!"

"But Nature has done twice and thrice as much in a contrary direction!" exclaimed his cousin, with glistening eyes.

"We shall see!—If no officious mischief-maker interfere to thrust us prematurely into each other's arms, Tiny, we may come round in time. Particularly when a pretty little sister-in-law presents herself to plead Arthur's cause with the Planter. I am not sure but I

may then surrender to Rawdon of Heckington the better half of the Fredville plantation."

Miss Corbet was beginning to disclaim such a contingency: the gathering shades of evening lending a veil to her blushes.

"But I hope you don't imagine, Tiny," resumed her companion, "that I have beguiled you out here, under Cromwell's old elm-trees, only to favour you with the family rent-roll. I want to talk to you about my morning's pains and pleasures."

"It must be an age since you visited Heckington?" she replied—to lead the way to his narrative.

"I had not seen the place these five years; not since my father's death; not since the Court of Chancery dug its teeth and claws into the property."

"And how was it looking? You had a lovely day for the expedition."

"The old hall did not charm me quite so much as when haunted by the little white

mouse of a cousin, half-a-dozen years ago. But English scenery is almost as new to me now, as when I then beheld it; and the park, with its fine timber and flowing stream, looked truly noble. I could have almost envied my brother, Tiny, while I stood gazing on the old oaks!—How glad I should have been, at that moment, to have had his little wife, as now, hanging on my arm!"

"And whom did you find in charge of the place?—Were they not delighted to see you?"

"No! Strangers—all strangers—put in by a Chancery Commission. A silver key, however, opened every door and gate; and I enjoyed the full advantage of being unrecognised as one of the family."

"Does my aunt, then, never visit Heckington?"

"I should think not, by the ruinous aspect of the house. Any one interested in its preservation could not but remonstrate. I have heard from Lucretia that my mother took in

dudgeon something said in an angry moment by my father, touching her family pride,—no matter what,—which determined her never to set foot in the place again."

"How can she keep away from a spot so stored with family associations?" said Tiny, with a heavy sigh.

"Half of which will be effaced, if she do not make haste. The family pictures are already covered with mildew. Scarcely a feature is to be traced. I was forced to mount on one of the old yellow damask settees to wipe away the damp from a lovely portrait you may recollect of *my* mother and *yours*, as children—seated on the ground to divide a basket of cherries—"

"Well, well do I remember it cousin. Grandmamma was very proud of it, as one of Gainsborough's best."

"And I, because the features of the Sophia Rawdon it commemorates, exhibit a lifelike resemblance to the little Tiny Sophia she left

behind. But it was melancholy to see those two sweet loving faces obscured by dust and cobwebs; the sun never admitted to shine upon them. Still more, to reflect how thoroughly the happy children had outlived the loving generosity which taught them to divide their basket of cherries!—They would not have shared Heckington.—Rather half-a-dozen chancery-suits!—"

"And was everything in the house equally neglected?" inquired Miss Corbet, who did not like to hear blame imputed to her dead mother.

"Everything—everything!—The keys would not turn in the locks; the window-bars could scarcely be brought down. Though it is July, and the glass at seventy-five degrees, the marble flags in the hall were as wet as if pails of water had been thrown over them. The house smelt like a church, and looked like a mausoleum."

"Surely you will mention all this to Aunt Enmore?—It ought to be looked to."

"It ought to be looked to, my dear energetic little coz. But I certainly sha'n't mention it to my mother. The Elderly Party would fancy me intent upon my interests, as heir-in-tail."

"To Arthur, then?—Why not write to Arthur?"

"For twenty thousand reasons, and not for twenty thousand worlds. Arthur is not sentimental. Arthur is guiltless of *Sehnsucht.* If he heard of my visit to the hall of our ancestors, the Rawdonism-of-Heckington inherent in him would explode, and he would fancy I went to spy into the nakedness of the land. Is it not disgusting, Tiny, that the golden leprosy of the century—self-interest—should have so diseased our nature, that I cannot open my heart to my own mother, or own brother, for fear of being suspected of mercenary motives!—Fie, fie, upon us all!"

"Fie upon *you,* now, Willy; for you are

unwarrantably bitter! But it is getting very late. Let us turn our steps back again; and on the way, tell me a little more about Heckington. That old corner of the flower-garden, where you used to pull up the orchises I had taken the trouble of transplanting from the water meadows. Is it still a garden?"

"Covered over with a heap of rubbish!—broken bricks from the old greenhouse—demolished, lest it should find its way down. —I longed, Tiny, to inquire whether the workmen had found in the old wall the relics of your best wax-doll, which I immured there, —(do you remember?) in one of the niches, —while you stood by, sobbing and heart-broken!"

"You were always a bad boy,—a very unkind cousin.—"

"If you speak such overplain English, burn or drown me if I give you the treasure I have brought back for you from Heckington!"

"Some old plaything!—"

"No, ungrateful girl—a new blossom,—from a tree recorded to have been planted near the old greenhouse, by my poor aunt Sophia."

In saying which, he drew from under his waistcoat a beautiful Macartney Rose, gathered from a tree which Miss Corbet well remembered to have been cherished by the late Mrs. Rawdon, for the sake of her lost daughter.

So many reminiscences of childhood came thronging to her heart, revived by the sight and scent of a flower she had never happened to see elsewhere than at Heckington, that her spirits became too much oppressed for further conversation.

Their return to Hertford Street, through the gloaming, was all but silent.

CHAPTER VII.

Sir James Armstead, though by no means the first sensible man who has made a foolish marriage, was among the few who prove their superiority by making the best of it. Instead of sacrificing his time to the entertainment of a peevish wife confined to the sofa by the infirmities of her situation, he provided ample amusement for her by a profusion of books and newspapers; and above all, by the companionship of a cheerful, amiable, female friend.

But he did more. He consulted even the interest of the cheerful friend; and, fancying Miss Corbet might be gratified by civilities offered to a near kinsman on the eve of his departure from England, left a card on William Enmore, and an invitation to dinner.

"You should take more pains to polish up your savage, my dear Tiny," said Lady Armstead, offering a crumpled note to Miss Corbet, the first time they met afterwards. "It does not suffice to trim his beard."

And by the scent of tobacco pervading the thin foreign paper on which the missive was hieroglyphed, Miss Corbet readily recognised one of the ill-got up epistles of her cousin Willy.

"Not a word of pleasure, or honour, or regret, or any of the polite shams with which decent people garnish their refusals," added Lady Armstead. "Bruin does not so much as plead a pre-engagement;—merely says, with

the most graceless condensation, that he cannot dine with us to-day."

"But why invite him?—I told your dear Amy, that Willy had made up his mind not to mix in society during his short stay in England.—He said, from the first, that it would be playing at bob-cherry with enjoyment."

"Still, he need not have expressed himself like a ploughboy."

"Certainly not,—for no one can less resemble one. My cousin is highly accomplished; —a good classic,—a perfect musician,—and speaks like a native several foreign languages."

"Not another word, Tiny," interrupted her friend, "or, in spite of his incivility, I shall bribe Policeman X, (who is parading yonder against the palisades of Park Lane,) to bring him here to dinner, per force of truncheon."

"It would not repay your pains. My poor cousin is too shy to ingratiate himself with

strangers. It is only those who know him well, that recognise his merits."

And very sincerely did his cousin recognise them at that moment!—A letter even worse written and folded than his own,—though not redolent of tobacco-smoke,—had reached her that morning by the post; which served to place his domestic virtues in the clearest light; a letter from her brother Alfred, at the Aldenham grammar-school, who could not say enough in favour of the step-cousin who had paid him a flying visit on his way to town from Heckington, the preceding day; having bestowed on him a tip unprecedented in the annals of that venerable academy.

"Young Enmore seems a stunning chap," wrote Miss Corbet's now schoolboy-icised pupil. "He told me, dearest Tiny, he had heard ever so much about me, from *you*."

Little, however, had she surmised at the time she entertained her cousin with her Grenfield House teachership,—or Alfred's pro-

ficiency under her charge, and her own intense love for the brother fated to rough it through the roughest of worlds, that not a syllable of her confidences had been lost upon Willy.

Of the schoolboy's letter, she resolved to abstain from all mention to her cousin, who, from motives of delicacy or motives unexplained, had carefully kept the secret of his visit. But the moment she found herself alone with him in the breakfast-room, her usual frankness prevailed. Out started her hands,—down rolled her grateful tears.—But "Oh! Willy, how kind, how very kind of you!" was the only eloquence at her disposal.

"Not another word.—I beg of you, dear Tiny, not another word!" he whispered, in reply; and as his mother was at that moment rustling into the room, fussing as usual about the key of the tea-chest, and the over-abundant supply of dry toast, he was probably afraid of provoking her jealous comments.

It was not very wonderful that, with her heart thus softened, Miss Corbet should listen impatiently to the sarcastic remarks of her friend Amy. It was not very wonderful that she found the discussion of Debates and Divisions between Sir James and his official Dittos, that day, unusually tedious. There seemed more life in the little finger of Willy Enmore, and more warmth in his heart, than in the half-dozen wheels of the heavy machine of the state, which were revolving around her. She had scarcely patience when Barton Frere puckered up his parchment cheek into a smile, while attempting to banter her concerning her *tête-à-tête* with the mysterious stranger. His stereotyped jokes,—part of every old bachelor's repertory of facetiæ,—concerning impending favours and wedding cake, instead of provoking a flippant retort, as they would have done from Florence or Carry Horsford, produced no other reply than an indignant blush.

"If William the Conqueror had con-

descended to dine here to-day," observed Lady Armstead, when she and her little friend were alone together in the drawing-room after dinner, "he would have heard news of his brother. For as little love as is lost between them, perhaps he might have cared to learn how narrow has been his own escape of becoming Rawdon of Heckington!"

"Has Arthur, then, been ill?"

"In the greatest danger;—but from an accident. I had a letter this morning from Bob. Probably, however, Mrs. Enmore knows all about it."

"If so, she has said nothing to *us*."

"Us, Tiny?—*Already?*"—

"I mean to my cousin and myself. My aunt, always reserved, seems very little disposed to talk about her absent son. But will you not tell me your news, Amy, that I may repeat it to Willy?"—

"You shall read my brother's letter," said Lady Armstead, carelessly taking it from the

drawer of her writing-table. And not without emotion did Miss Corbet commence the perusal of a long epistle, dated from Interlaken, which, in spite of the slang and chaff which rendered it almost unintelligible to a home-reared girl, excited her heartfelt interest.

In an expedition recently attempted by Arthur Enmore and his college chum, among the adjoining mountains, in which they had rashly dispensed with a guide, Arthur Enmore, it appeared, had met with a terrible fall. His own near-sightedness, or the slipperiness of the grass, had hurried him to the edge of a precipice; and young Horsford, in describing his horror at witnessing the sudden disappearance of his friend, wrote with such bewildered earnestness, as to be somewhat difficult of comprehension.

"As well as I could manage, by grasping the long grass and bushes on the hillside," he wrote, — "with my heart sick, my breath choking, and my head dizzy, I endea-

voured to look over the brink, my dear Amy, and ascertain the worst. But not a trace of the poor fellow was visible! Masses of stunted pine-trees concealed the base of the overhanging rock from which he fell; and full twenty minutes elapsed before, in a drizzling rain, I was able to wind my way to the fatal spot: where, judge of my consternation, I beheld only a huddled heap of clothes!—It seemed all U. P. with Rawdon of Heckington!—

"I had scarcely strength to turn him on his back and ascertain the worst. I expected to find him smashed, mangled, unrecognisable. However, by God's blessing, he had fallen on thick grass and soft underwood; and was insensible only from the shock. No broken bones,—only a frightful concussion. I promise you, however, that it was a trying moment when, after pouring no end of *Kirsch* down his throat from the pocket-pistol with which we were luckily provided, I saw him

slowly unclose his eyes. I had still to learn whether he had sustained any mortal injury; and I don't know that I was ever better pleased than when, after striking out his legs and arms as if swimming the lake instead of floundering like a trout on the grass, poor Arthur gradually picked himself up, and sang out, 'All right, old fellow!'—like a good 'un!

"It wasn't all right, however; as the doctors found, to his cost, when, with the help of a couple of foresters whom I luckily found working half a mile from the spot, I got him placed on a hurdle, and carried back, at a snail's pace, to the hotel. For the first two days, they declared that the spine was injured, and ordered the unlucky patient to lie motionless on the sofa: where he might have been extended till now, had he followed their stupid injunctions. But Atty's natural restlessness stood his friend. On the third day, he must needs be up and stirring; when lo! the injured

spine turned out to be nothing worse than a muscular sprain. Except for an awkward limp, he is now beginning to walk about his room like other people; only that having been at first copiously bled—bled like a calf—he remains as weak as a rat. When I thought him in danger, I asked his leave to notify his disaster to his brother and mother; and if you had only seen him flare up at the proposal!—I must beg you, therefore, to say nothing of it to the old lady in Hertford Street, who might take it into her head to write to Willy at Dresden; and *that* would never do!—If *he* were to come here, his brother, lame and disabled as he is, would rush out straight into the lake. Atty will not hear his name mentioned."

A few rambling family messages to Clevelands concluded the letter; which, from first to last, served only to wound the sensitive feelings of Miss Corbet.

"Strange people to live amongst, these

Enmores!" observed Lady Armstead, on noticing her air of chagrin.

But Tiny was just then puzzling herself whether it were not her duty to communicate to her cousin what she had learned from her friend; for to *her*, Arthur's prohibitions, or Bob Horsford's injunctions, were nothing.

Fagged and out of spirits, it was a relief to be informed by Harding, on her return home, that his lady had retired for the night. She made her way, however, to the drawing-room, to place in a vase standing on the table, some rare exotics given her by Lady Armstead, which had been sent up that morning from Higham Grange; beautiful, but far less precious than the Heckington rose she had carefully laid aside to dry!—Of finding Willy established there, she entertained no apprehension; for at that hour, he was always at his Club. Yet *there* he was, extended on the sofa, apparently asleep; and she was about to steal from the room, and leave

him to his slumbers, when he suddenly started up.

"I thought you were never coming back!" he exclaimed, contemplating with admiring eyes her airy white muslin dress and richly braided hair.—"How pretty you look, Tiny!—fresh as a flower! All dinner-time, I was taking shame to myself for my excuses to those people in Park Lane.—To think that, but for my own sullen obstinacy, I might have spent several additional hours in your company!"—

"And *why* did you excuse yourself?" said she, not sitting down, but still holding her candle in one hand and her flowers in the other.

"Because I detest the whole hen-coop of Horsfords!—Bob is my sworn enemy, as I am *his*."

"He may be no friend of yours, Willy;—but he is a very attached one of your brother."

"Only because he wants him for a brother-in-law. The Horsfords are patent impostors."

"I cannot help hoping that you are over-severe," said Miss Corbet.

And without further hesitation, she related to him the story of Arthur's accident, and the intense anxiety of his friend.

Even Lady Armstead, had she been present, would have found no fault with the degree of sensibility evinced by Willy Enmore throughout the narrative. Though he abstained from interrupting his cousin by a single inquiry or exclamation, the tears brimming in his eyes, the colour fluctuating in his cheeks, demonstrated his heartfelt interest in her story; and when, at the close, she repeated Bob Horsford's hopes that the "dear old fellow would soon be on his pins again," Willy fetched a deep breath, as though relieved from an intolerable burthen.

The certainty of his brother's safety was not, however, more gratifying to *him*, than was to his cousin the sight of his emotion.

Why was he always endeavouring to smother

every natural feeling, every humane sentiment? Was it, indeed, as he asserted, because sordid interest had been rendered by his parents the predominating influence of life?—Had he been taught to despise sensibility as a weakness, in a home, which, human love being banished, scarcely deserved the name?

"Dearest Tiny," said he, at length taking her hand, for, absorbed by the details of his story, she had unconsciously deposited on the table her light and flowers,—"how much am I indebted to you for disregarding Arthur's injunction!—How truly do I thank you for confiding to me all this!"

"But surely," remonstrated Miss Corbet,—and at that moment, unseen by either, a third person entered the room of which the door was standing a-jar,—"surely we ought to confide it to my aunt? She will never forgive us for keeping her so completely in the dark."

"Not for worlds!" exclaimed Willy, imprinting a kiss on the hand he was grasping,

—"I must act first, and enlighten her afterwards. I will never forgive *you*, Tiny, if, till I sanction it, you afford the slightest warning to my mother."

Apprised by Miss Corbet's sudden start and rapid paleness that something was amiss, the agitated Willy, turning towards the door, at which poor Tiny was glancing, descried his mother standing in her night-dress on the threshold.

Now if no man be a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*, no woman short of Mrs. Siddons in Lady Macbeth, ever looked august in a bedgown.—Mrs. Enmore least of all: for the removal of her capillary attractions reducing her to her "just integrity," she acquired, with her wide-frilled nightcap, full twenty years of age.

It was fortunate, therefore, that, whether or not she intended to play the spy on her son and niece, she at least did not aspire to a tragic dénouement of the domestic drama

Scenes were out of Mrs. Enmore's line; and open combat was foreign to her system.

"I felt alarmed at hearing voices in the drawing-room, having left Willy asleep, and not knowing you were returned," said she, calmly addressing her niece. "I thought it best to make sure that Harding, who gets drowsy from our present late hours, had put out the lights. How did you find Lady Armstead to-day?"

"Not very well. But she roused herself to entertain her company, and was quite cheerful before I left," said Miss Corbet, greatly confused by the custody of a family-secret to be concealed from her aunt.

"You must go and see her again to-morrow, then," said Mrs. Enmore, with self-command undiminished by her maternal discoveries. "And now, my dear, as it has struck twelve, let us ring the bell, and release poor Harding from further attendance."

"Good night, mother!—Good night, dear,

dear Tiny !" said Willy, again pressing his lips to the hand he had not relinquished.

And his cousin, aware of the painful feelings just then struggling in his bosom, attributed his unusual fervour to his recent shock.

In the silence of her own chamber, she sat ruminating on all that had passed; on the escape of Arthur Rawdon, and the sudden betrayal of fraternal tenderness on the part of his brother; and, thus occupied, a brief night of July glided imperceptibly away. Morning peeped into the chamber before she retired to rest.

Wearied in heart and soul, she fell heavily asleep;—little surmising that in the interim her aunt was planning a plausible letter to be written on the morrow, requesting Mr. Corbet to "fetch home his dear Sophia to Grenfield House; as the languid looks of her niece were beginning to betray the ill-effects of a prolonged sojourn in London. She did not wish to alarm him. But the sooner he

removed her to a purer atmosphere, the better."

Like most manœuvrers, the prudent mother rejoiced by anticipation in the success of her projects. The young couple still doubtful how much of their conversation the preceding night she had overheard, would be startled as by a *coup d'état* by Mr. Corbet's arrival; more particularly, as she intended to warn her simple-hearted brother-in-law against all mention of her letter.—"It might be injurious to poor Tiny if she discovered that her friends were uneasy about her health."

The Elderly Party made no extraordinary haste in rising or dressing, with the view of circumventing further *tête-à-têtes* between the young couple. It sufficed that her iron grasp was upon them.

"Is Miss Corbet down?" she inquired of her prim maid, Parkins, as she fastened the last hook of her dress.

"No, mem,—nor stirring, that I can hear;

which is the more curious, considering her early habits, when she first came to this house."

"We were all later than usual, last night, Parkins."

"So I find, mem. I was amazed to hear you go back to the drawing-room long after I had left you, undressed. I was even thinking of stepping down myself, mem, to give you a shawl."

"It was a very close night. No chance of my taking cold."

"Then, perhaps, it *was* best, mem, to sit late, and take leave of Mr. William, over night, sooner than be roused up at such a pleposterous hour in the morning. Harding was forced to go to bed again,—after Mr. Willy was gone, mem;—quite knocked up, by having to carry down them heavy boxes!"

"What heavy boxes?"—inquired Mrs. Enmore, aghast.

"Why, certainly perhaps, mem, not the

heaviest. Probably Mr. William did not wish to have you and Miss Corbet disturbed at six o'clock in the morning by the hurry-skurry of porters on the stairs. The mail-trunks are left corded and directed upstairs, to go by the afternoon goods-train."

Mrs. Enmore was by this time even more astounded than she had been by her overhearings, in the drawing-room, the preceding night. But, ever on her guard, she took care not to betray to her prying attendant, how thoroughly she was taken by surprise.

"At what hour did he go?" she said, composedly extending her muslin sleeve to be buttoned.

"At twenty minutes past six, mem. I looked at my watch when I heard the cab rattle off; which not being able to account for, I thought somethen must be amiss. For though others may have known all about it, *I* wasn't no-wise apprised of Mr. William's departure; no more wasn't Harding."

Had Mrs. Enmore received intelligence of her son's elopement with his cousin, she could scarcely have felt more overcome. Though predetermined that the young people should not abide many days longer under the same roof, she wished their separation to be an act and deed of her own; not the result of a fit of petulance on the part of either. The tendency of this sudden act of wilfulness, who could guess?—Its motive, it was difficult not to attribute to an avowal he had extorted from her, at dinner the preceding day, when she endeavoured, by remote hints, to persuade him that a steam-voyage to Jamaica, in the dog-days, would be almost as pleasant as yachting. On his laughingly demurring to such an opinion, she had foolishly added—

"At all events, it would be better than a summer in town. Even Arthur, in his last letter, expressed his wonder that you, who have always affected to hate and despise

a London life, should be dawdling out the season in Hertford Street."

"But how does he *know* that I am dawdling in Hertford Street?" was his rejoinder. "We have not corresponded these two years. Have you been complaining to him, mother, of the length of my visit?"

"Your brother doubtless heard of it from the Horsfords. I never mention your name to him. It would only produce dissension between us."

No sooner had the words escaped her lips than she would have given worlds to recall them. When she saw the flame that glared in the eyes of her son, as he repeated, accompanied by the most opprobrious epithets, the name of the Horsfords, she was thankful that hundreds of leagues of sea and land intervened between her unbrotherly offspring.

And now, she was fain to attribute his abrupt departure to her own rash hint, and Willy's resentment of his brother's enmity!

But her first object was to put a good face upon the matter with her niece.

Refreshed by sleep after her careworn night, Tiny soon made her appearance in the cheerful breakfast-room, into which the summer sun was shining pleasantly. Her quick eye instantly noted that the table was laid for two; that no chair, no cup-and-saucer, were set for "Mr. William."

"Does not Willy breakfast at home this morning?" said she, anxiously; for after a wrangle with his mother, he often breakfasted at the Travellers', or at Verey's.

"Surely he took leave of you last night?" said Mrs. Enmore, intently watching her. "Are you not aware that my son is off for Jamaica?"

"Impossible, dear aunt;—impossible—impossible!" cried Miss Corbet, as pale as death.

"His luggage is to follow him, this afternoon. See!—The van of the South-Western

railway is at the door, to convey it to Waterloo station."

Tiny flew to the window, to verify the assertion. In another moment, she was in the hall. Yes! one of the boxes already brought down was standing there, addressed to—

"William Enmore, Esq., Passenger,
"W. I. Mail Office,
"Southampton Docks."

"You seem astounded, my dear?" observed Mrs. Enmore, as her niece staggered back into the room, and threw herself into a chair.

"Say, rather, *grieved!*" was the frank reply. "That he should have gone without a word! —That he should have left England at such a time!"

And she seemed so near fainting, that Mrs. Enmore, almost touched by her distress, poured out a glass of iced water, which, in

compliment to Willy's predilections, stood on the side-table.

An unwonted gleam of sympathy in her keen eyes had all but betrayed her niece into a full avowal of her especial motives for deploring the precipitate flight of Arthur's only brother. She could scarcely refrain from owning how fervently she had hoped that the danger and escape from death of the elder, would have moved the heart of the younger to seek a full and affectionate reconciliation; that he would overlook Rawdon of Heckington in the Interlaken invalid.

But her pledge to Lady Armstead sealed her lips; and the confusion with which she checked herself after uttering—"He *ought* not to have gone.—It was very wrong—very cruel—very wicked. He half promised that—" Then, instead of concluding her sentence, covered her face with her hands and wept bitterly,—served only to confirm the false impressions of Mrs. Enmore.

Accustomed to repress her own emotions, she regarded hysterical tears with the same terror and annoyance that others contemplate a fire; and the restraint ever efficacious in her own case to secure self-control, was the only one that suggested itself on the present occasion to restore Miss Corbet to composure. She summoned the servants, as witnesses. She rang for Harding to bring the urn. She sent for Parkins to bring her keys. If *their* presence did not compel her niece to self-government, she was incorrigible.

But Harding was slow in making his appearance; being occupied in endeavouring to repel the entrance of Lucretia Rawdon, who, ere the street-door was closed after the driving off of the railway-van, had forced her way into the hall, and was inexorable to the plea of—"not at home."

"I don't want to see my cousin Jane,—I don't want to see Sophia Corbet," she said, furling her ample parasol with a manifest

resolve to make her way in. "But I *must* and will see Mr. Willy. I have particular business with him."

Harassed out of all forbearance by his crosses and cares of the morning, the "pampered menial" gruffly informed her that, unless her business could be transacted by letter, she would have to await his return from Jamaica. But on this hint, she became clamorous to see "Cousin Jane," or even the contemned Tiny.—She was not to be denied.

Preferring even this unpalatable intervention to a *tête-à-tête* with her niece, Mrs. Enmore came forward to sanction the admittance of the angry spinster.

"It is true, then?" cried she, when, after shaking hands stiffly with the mistress of the house, she discerned traces of tears on the eyelashes of her younger cousin.—"He's *really* gone?—*Not* one of those specious shams with which the servants here are always so ready?—Sailed for the West Indies, eh?—Probably

never to return!—The yellow fever is raging in Spanish Town!—The cholera is at its worst throughout the island! — Jane, Jane! why don't you answer?—Why don't you speak?—Who ever thought you would turn out such an unnatural mother!—You've driven that poor lad out of house and home, to die like a dog amongst strangers!"

"Since you are so much interested in our family affairs," rejoined Mrs. Enmore, in a low, husky voice, "you cannot but be aware that Willy arrived here from Germany only on his way to visit the Fredville Estate."

"I know what *brought* him to England. But both you and I are perfectly aware what *kept* him here. Don't leave the room, Tiny. I have nothing to say but what you ought to hear. When Willy was with me the day before yesterday, he told me distinctly that he should remain in London another month, unless (which wasn't unlikely,) his mother worried him away. And you *have* worried

him, Jane. He's gone; and you'll repent it to the longest day you have to live."

In the intensity of her irritation, the enraged spinster totally disregarded the presence of Harding, who was now storing his mind with the why and because of the family commotion, by pretending to effect a dexterous coalition between the teapot and the tea-urn.

"It is no fault of mine," Mrs. Enmore observed, vaguely hoping still to deceive somebody, "that my son did not think it necessary to apprise you of his intended departure. He may have had motives of his own for the concealment."

"Nonsense!—there is neither motive nor concealment in his nature. Willy is all impulse. Don't judge him by yourself. Tiny, give me a glass of that cold water — I feel as if I was choking."

Cousin Jane was, perhaps, less desirous than she ought to have been that the sensa-

tion might prove deceptive. But the Cassandra of the Rawdon dynasty soon recovered sufficient breath to renew her denunciations.

"I emphatically declare, and would swear it on oath," cried she, "that, two days ago, when Willy returned from Heckington—"

"From *Heckington?*"

"He had no more thoughts of leaving England for weeks to come, than I have of starting for Constantinople! Do you think he would have commissioned me to wait upon his grandfather's executors, or trustees, or whatever those rogues of lawyers in Took's Court choose to call themselves, and let him know the result of my interview, if he hadn't intended to be on the spot and hear what I might have to communicate?"

"You are, as usual, indulging in strange delusions," said Mrs. Enmore. "My son Willy has not visited Heckington for years.

What should he do there?—What are the trustees to *him?*"

"It is because they are nothing, that he chose *me* to confer with them. But since you have no faith in my word, ask Tiny there, how long it is since her cousin was at Heckington."

"I shall ask no one," rejoined the "Elderly Party," perceiving, by a furtive glance at her niece's heightened complexion, that she was prepared to second the assertions of Lucretia. "Whatever my son wished me to know of his movements or affairs, he personally communicated. Anything he preferred confiding to other people, was doubtless less qualified to meet a mother's ear."

"No such thing!" persisted Lucretia, not to be silenced by plausible flourish. "Willy did not acquaint you with his visit to his family seat, because your suspicious nature would have been fishing out evil motives for what was a natural instinct. All he desired to

learn from the trustees was, whether, since they did not choose to incur the expense of airing the house, or keeping it weather-tight, he might be permitted to contribute a sufficient sum, annually, to secure the preservation of the pictures."

"Very provident, certainly. It is not every heir-in-tail who would take such thought for an inheritance little likely to come into his possession."

"You wrong him—you wrong him! Sordid calculations had no share in my cousin's anxiety about the ruinous state of Heckington," cried Miss Corbet, breaking silence for the first time since the entrance of Lucretia. "*I*, dear Aunt, am not the heir-in-tail,—*I* have no claims on Heckington. But it grieved me almost as much as it did him, to find the only existing portraits of our two mothers, disfigured by a coat of mildew."

Was the crimson flush that overspead the sallow face of Mrs. Enmore, as she listened to

this protest, produced by learning the degradation of a picture formerly so prized by her parents; or by the confirmation thus afforded, that a secret understanding existed between her son and niece?

At all events, she had too much on her hands at present, in parrying the attacks and abridging the visit of her unwelcome guest, to elucidate the question.

Tiny must bide her time!—

CHAPTER VIII.

Squire Horsford of Clevelands, though, for twenty years, he had enjoyed in his county the consequence and comfort attendant on a fine estate, was beginning to be reminded by a certain perennial thinness at the elbows of his coat and toes of his boots, that what was wealth for a newly-married couple, may be rendered poverty by the overgrowth of an expensive family. He was one of the many whose place the rapid march of luxury, in England, is rendering untenable.

With a wife and daughters intent upon vying in finery and fashion with ladyships six times greater and richer than themselves,—with a fast son at Oxford, another in the Crimea, and a wild Etonian rising fifteen, it was difficult to make both ends of his income meet; and impossible to renovate the furniture of Clevelands, which was growing shabby, or prevent the gardens and greenhouses from looking weedy and sere.

The too easy master of the family had been long persuaded by his wife that an annual visit to London was indispensable for the interests of his daughters; and the brilliant marriage of their pretty Amy afforded unlucky support to her system. It was, however, a sad disappointment to find that Lady Armstead's chaperonage of her sisters was not to enable them to dispense with their usual season in town; and that his hopefuls were not likely to appropriate to themselves, as they had expected, the excellent stud and capital

preserves of their new brother-in-law. The grave, well-bred Sir James Armstead, who took no liberties, was not a man with whom liberties could be taken.

Having courteously declined the invitation of the Horsfords to visit Clevelands with his dear Amy at the close of the Session, on the plea of long-standing engagements at home, he expressed a hope of seeing *them* in Somersetshire later in the year;—adding something about the excellence of the cock-shooting at Higham Grange, which purported to render the "later" as late as possible.

The Squire was satisfied; for Mr. Horsford, under the pressure of family cares, and an inveterate gout, had shuffled on to a time of life when even a sporting man is content to take sportsmanship easy; handling his rod, gun, or hunting-whip, as tamely as he would his umbrella, to lounge over his own property, rather than go further and fare better. Unceasingly taxed by the extravagance of his

scattered offspring, it was lucky that the narrowness of his mind rendered him insensible to the gradual decay of his body and estate. He continued to keep his game-lists and hunting-journal, with all their vicissitudes of weather, stud, and kennels, with exemplary punctuality. The Reform of the House of Commons he left to Sir James Armstead; the reform and private bills of his own house, to the mismanagement of his wife.

The fine trout-stream that fertilised the meadows of Clevelands, luckily afforded the poor squire a pretext for seeing as little as possible of the ready-furnished house in town into which his family was cramped, while the may-fly was on the water; and on their return home, languid and discontented, at the close of the season, the prospect of becoming a grandpapa announced to him by his wife, fully accounted for the anxiety evinced by Sir James Armstead that for the present their

pretty Amy should lead a quiet life. About December, when he hoped to "have a shy at the Somersetshire woodcocks," he trusted to find a little son-and-heir flourishing at Higham Grange.

It was consequently rather startling to Mr. Horsford when, one fine day in September, in crossing the high road on the outskirts of his property in pursuit of a covey of partridges, and to the impediment of a rough pony, with Henry Corbet on its back, he was forced to stand and deliver his stock of neighbourly news; and found that, while his daughters were grumbling in the shrubberies of Clevelands, the pretty bridesmaid of Grenfield House was enjoying with the Armsteads the bracing air of Higham Downs.

"I had promised my sister-in-law that Tiny should accompany her to the sea-side before she returned home," said Mr. Corbet, in answer to the civil inquiries after his daughter of his brother sportsman; "for Mrs. Enmore

usually spends the fall of the year at Broadstairs, or East Bourne, or some other bathing-place. But when it came to the start, Sir James and Lady Armstead, who had shown no end of kindness to my girl all the season long, were so urgent that she should give them her company for a month or two, that her aunt was prevailed upon to give her up. But all this can be no news to you," added Mr. Corbet, "so I needn't keep you pottering here, balking Ponto and Don in their scent."

The truth was, that both to aunt and niece the pressing invitation of the Armsteads afforded a very acceptable alternative. In their present relative position, they were far from happy together; and Parkins and Harding, who were in the habit of refreshing themselves with the annual enjoyment of complete do-nothingness in seaside lodgings, did their utmost to forward a scheme that relieved them from additional trouble. Tiny herself, aware that she was not expected at home before

Christmas, was not sorry to enjoy the interim in an atmosphere somewhat less torpid than the unhomeish home of her aunt. It was too full of reminiscences, too full of Willy; the cousin who had quitted her as he would have flung off some garment of which he was weary; marking his contempt of her opinions and prayers by quitting Europe at the moment when his only brother lay in peril of death. How could she continue to care for one who cared so little for herself?—How could she continue to care for one who betrayed such unchristianly hardness of heart?—To quit the spot which reproduced him every moment before her eyes, was indeed a relief!

Right happy would she have been, if, at the moment of bidding her farewell, she could have fancied that the only sister of her lost mother experienced the smallest regret at her departure. But Mrs. Enmore's heart was embittered against her, as in some degree the

origin of renewed family discord. It was something, moreover, to be relieved from the presence of a person with whom she was continually playing a part.

Nor were her feelings mollified towards her niece, when, some days after she had quitted town with the Armsteads, a newspaper reached Hertford Street, per post, addressed in the well-known handwriting of Lucretia Rawdon; which contained, under the head of "Interlaken," a full but somewhat exaggerated account of the accident which had befallen her son. That he was safe,—preserved, as by a miracle, from destruction, — did not half so much elicit her gratitude to Heaven, as her conviction that, through her intimacy with the Horsford family, Tiny had been from the first apprised of the event which she had carefully preserved from her knowledge provoked her anger. Nothing so irritating to a cunning person as to be over-reached.

The poor girl whose life had been of late

encircled by a hedge of thorns, was enjoying meanwhile the full advantage of living among people unprivileged by affinity of blood to tyrannise over her thoughts and feelings. The good nature of Amy, now subdued by indisposition, and the well-bred intelligence of her husband, rendered them truly acceptable companions after the narrow-minded despotism of Mrs. Enmore.

It surprised her, however, a little, after hearing Sir James enlarge so feelingly on the advantage his poor wife would derive from the cheerful society of an old friend, to find on their arrival at Higham Grange, that a succession of company was expected. So far from the "poor wife" having a solitary dressing-room to apprehend, the utmost sacrifice required of Tiny in her behalf, was to share the pleasant task of entertaining the neighbourhood, and welcoming the *habitués* of Park Lane.

Higham Grange was a respectable old

family-seat, built by an opulent ancestor, and untortured out of its original symmetry by modern improvements. The structure was Jacobean—the gardens accordant—the avenue singularly fine; the whole establishment on a nobler scale than any with which Tiny had been hitherto familiar. The Armstead baronetcy was one of the oldest of that much-abused Order of semi-nobility; and its present representative had enlisted in official life from no covetousness of either salary or a coronet; but because, having greatly distinguished himself at the University, he was hailed as a predestined premier, both by his family and the groundlings.

Nine arrows in ten fall short of the mark; and for one Hamlet, there arise scores of Laerteses. But Sir James Armstead, though neither a Burleigh nor a Chatham, turned out an excellent Under-Secretary. While his contemporaries devoted their energies to suppressing the fox, or encouraging the pheasant, he

was working for the country by repressing tickets of leave, and hatching Colonies and Reformatories. Let us hope that he was working for conscience sake! At all events, he had attained the first station on his road to a peerage.

In the case of most officials, it is the pavement of Downing Street, or floor of the House of Commons, that entitles a placeman to say "my foot is on my native heath, and my name is Macgregor." But Armstead the Baronet, was never so much himself as when his boot was on the pavement of his noble hall at Higham, and his eye on his own name imprinted upon hundreds of carts and agricultural-machines, contributing to the cultivation of the mother-earth wherewith his own clay was congenial;—the earth whose business it was to produce harvests of heavy wheat, early peas, and French potherbs, for his behoof. His pretty Amy had not abided eight-and-forty hours under the roof of Higham Grange,

before she fancied that her wedded lord was a different man from the M.P. of the London session. Stewards, bailiffs, head-gardeners, and all the paraphernalia of landed proprietorship, had added a cubit to his stature.

In Park Lane, in spite of a few bickerings and occasional resentments, she had loved him as an indulgent husband, a little too old for her. But now, as he paced the stately terraces of Higham Grange, she looked up to him as one who, if arrayed in the starched ruff and velvet doublet of Raleigh's time, entitled to the axe and block of despotic sovereignty, would have done honour to his caste. She wondered only how he had ever stooped from his granite and Caen stone, to the stuccoed insignificance of Clevelands! Even the venerable servants of the house commanded her consideration; and there was a silver-haired head-keeper of stalwart proportions, whose stately salutation it was difficult not to acknowledge in kind.

But if the impressions received by Lady Armstead were of a favourable sort, those she created were fully as advantageous. On her first inauguration into bureaucratic life, in Park Lane, the polished man of the world was occasionally a little shocked at the Horsford levity still inherent in his wife. But all flippancy was now subdued in the delicate-looking invalid, enveloped in muslin and mechlin, so happy in his society and the mild companionship of Tiny Corbet; and who was shortly to crown the ancient honours of Higham Grange, by a direct heir to its line.

Sir James had been scarcely aware how much this was an object to him. He had never surmised how much more beauty he should discover in the sweet pale face that smiled beside his library-fire, than in the brilliant Amy of the London ball-room, or Clevelands lawn-meet.

He had, indeed, to thank his own foresight

for having estranged her from the influence of the flirting sisters and deceitful mother, who had promoted the union of the beauty of the family with a man twenty years older than herself, only that she might shine a London belle; wearing finer dresses and giving more fêtes, than she could have otherwise pretended to. But he also knew that, in conquering the new wife whom a second marriage, as it were, had made his own, he was not a little indebted to the gentle, kindly, unassuming companion he had urged upon her friendship.

How much the calm dignity of Higham Grange had assisted in matronising his lady, he little suspected. Nay, he might perhaps have felt mortified that the wife in whom his personal reputation, parliamentary standing and inherited rank, had excited so little respect, should have been so much impressed by the train of mounted tenants that arrived to welcome them on the verge of his domain; —by the deferential deportment of his old-

fashioned household,—and by the dignified family gallery of which Holbein had laid the foundation. It was certainly not to *these* he wished to be indebted for her first consciousness of his importance.—It was not to the flashy vulgarity of her antecedents he cared to owe her newly-found sense of his dignity. It was not the simpering faces of the one generation of Horsfords which preceded her father,—the son of a stockbroker whose father was a myth,—that ought to have imparted a charm to his own long-bodiced great grandmothers.

A man so wise in his generation ought, however, to have been thankful to local influence and the grand old avenues of Higham Grange for having accomplished what his personal merit had failed to effect.

CHAPTER IX.

"Next week, my dear Amy, when the Brookdales arrive," said Sir James, one morning to his wife, as they were making the tour of the orangerie into which the well-fruited old trees had just been removed for the winter,—"we must invite a few of our neighbours. My sister will expect it; and it will be a relief to Miss Corbet. You and I are beginning to count but as one," he added, fondly pressing her arm,—"and the poor girl will be tired of a continual *tête-à-tête*."—

"How little you know her. The library and gardens are sufficient company for Tiny. She has led such a sober, lonely life, that the perpetual excitement without which Flo. and Carry cannot exist, only serves to bore and fatigue Tiny."

"Lucky girl,—or rather lucky man who obtains her for a wife!—I wish she would take a fancy to my friend Frere, who is more than three parts in love with her."

"A FANCY, to that horrid old Barton Frere?"—

"Did you not promise me, traitress, that you would never again apply the epithet 'old' to my friends and contemporaries?"

"But Barton Frere is *not* your contemporary. I am convinced he was born bald and tiresome."

"As my head of hair is at present unimpeachable, I can afford to let you use the words bald and tiresome, as synonymous. I can assure you, however, that Frere would

make an admirable husband, and place his wife in an excellent position."

"I don't believe Tiny cares about position. Only she *must* love the people she lives with. She was perfectly contented in her poky old home; because she dearly loved her father and mother and little brothers."

"There are hopes then, that she did *not* love her handsome cousin in Hertford Street; as she seems to have been overjoyed to escape from thence."

"One can't tell. She never talks about him—though often about her little school-boy-pupil."

"That looks ugly!—" Sir James was on the point of adding. But he refrained; certain that every word he uttered respecting Miss Corbet would, in the course of the day, be repeated to her by his wife.

When Lord and Lady Brookdale arrived, so far from feeling their coming to be a relief, Miss Corbet deeply regretted the quiet little

family trio where she was almost as much at home as in the Grenfield parlour. Amy had become so mild and sisterly;—Sir James was so agreeable a companion,—so even-tempered and so full of anecdote!—That he was indebted for her high appreciation of his elocution to the skill with which he frequently led the conversation to the state and prospects of the West Indian Colonies; the influence of Abolition and the value of Slave-grown Sugars, she would have been loth to admit.

The Brookdales, however, though an interruption, were inoffensive, well-bred people—pummiced down to the superficial polish of a conventional life; thinking, feeling, as well as talking, in a whisper;—"shocked" and "distressed" at hearing of things that would scarcely have disturbed the serenity of a fly; and believing the country to be in danger whenever a few score of grimy malcontents assembled in some obscure borough to pass a vote of censure upon government.

Even the little girl of ten years old, "sole daughter of their house and heart," whom they brought with them, — not, however, unguarded by a patent governess, or unprovided with a bale of schoolbooks,—was a model of precocious propriety.—When her mother glanced at her across the room, the poor child instinctively drew up, as if at drill; and when asked by Uncle Armstead whether she had been out walking that morning, replied in a tremulous voice, (as instructed,) that "she had accompanied Miss Strickney on the Terrace for a slight relaxation."

The over-educated child, who though endowed by nature with beautiful features, looked pale and puny, wore round her neck a locket engraved with a coronet and initials, bestowed on her by a royal godmother; by virtue of which, she had been devoted to prospective courtiership, as Catholic children, in their cradles, are often *voué au blanc*, or dedicated to the service of the Virgin.

In addition to the Brookdales, a large party arrived the following day. But why indulge in the platitude of describing a large party in a country-house?—Are not all country neighbourhoods alike?—Are not all country-houses alike?—The same preliminary perambulation through the guest-rooms of the stately housekeeper, to see that the linen is well-aired and the fires blazing; the same ringing of bells and coughing of post-horses just as day is dusk and the curtains are drawn; the same procession up the back-stairs of grumbling footmen bearing imperials, and grumbling ladies' maids, dressing-cases, and lapdogs; the same laborious conversation round the drawing-room fire, concerning the state of the roads and prospects of the weather, —everywhere suffice to prove that a score of reluctant human beings have abandoned their comfortable firesides, for the cold-catching duty of eating the dinner and shooting the pheasants of some neighbour

from whom they expect a similar sacrifice in return.

On the present occasion, all were glad to come. For there was a bride and a new *ménage* to be criticised; and many who were angry that Sir James Armstead, after waiting so long, had selected a wife having nothing but a pretty face to recommend her, hoped to find their ill-nature justified by her incompetency to do the honours of such a house as Higham Grange.

But above all, they rejoiced in the opportunity of meeting the Brookdales. During her brother's bachelorhood, Lady Brookdale had never visited the Grange; and the position of her lord in the Royal Household imparted immense consequence, in the eyes of her early neighbours, to an utterly insignificant woman. Though in reality as devoid of influence at Windsor Castle as one of the Poor Knights in its Almshouses, she was as reverentially addressed as if Lord Brookdale had Stars,

Garters, and Mitres at his disposal, to shower down upon his acquaintance.

To poor Tiny, on the other hand, the Somersetshire worthies paid not the smallest attention. So simply dressed, so simply mannered, so anxious to diminish the hostessly fatigues of her friend Amy, by showing the younger ladies to their rooms, and taking care that the elder ones were inducted into the softest-cushioned chairs and sofas—she passed at first for one of Lady Armstead's sisters; and, on being introduced as "Miss Corbet," instead of "Miss Horsford," was set down as a poor relation.

Even Lady Brookdale, who had once or twice found her sitting with her sister-in-law in London, on head-achey or rainy days, had come in the first instance to the same conclusion; and after noticing the good-natured zeal with which she took care, on their arrival, that Miss Strickney and her pupil's tea should be attended to, took an early opportunity to

inquire of her brother whether Miss Corbet was permanently engaged as Lady Armstead's companion.

"*Engaged?*" said he, inexpressibly amused. "Surely, my dear Maria, you remember Mr. and Mrs. Rawdon of Heckington, with whom my father and mother used to exchange country visitations a hundred years ago? Our young friend is the only child of their eldest daughter; and had she been *Master* Corbet instead of *Miss*, would have inherited their property, which her mother enjoyed only for her life."

"A fine old place, Heckington. I recollect the gray carp there, coming to be fed," observed Lady Brookdale, (a thin-faced, high-nosed woman, whose sharp physiognomy was like a bad translation of the dignified Roman face of her brother)—"and the peacocks on the balustrades of the terraces."

"Mrs. Rawdon, by whom her grand-

daughter was brought up, left her a small fortune. But the father, a Clevelands neighbour, is married again, to a confirmed invalid; and my wife, who is very fond of Miss Corbet, is glad to afford her a little change of scene."

Poor Tiny would have been amused had she known to what she was indebted for Lady Brookdale's sudden thawing from her uncivil frigidity. But by the awe-stricken manner in which she heard the word "*Windsor*" whispered behind fans by the ladies gathered after dinner round the hearthrug, and knowing nothing by her own experience of courts or courtiers, she concluded that caprice might be "the badge of all their tribe."

The profound deference with which her ladyship was accosted by the Somersetshire neighbours who had considered her, when Miss Armstead, as a plain dull girl, as little of an addition to the society of Higham

Grange as one of the milestones in the park, was truly edifying.

None of them were London-going people; or if they *did* indulge in a season in town, for the purpose of marrying a daughter or extending their wings over a fledgeling son, during his first season in the Guards, they took up their abode on the outskirts of civilisation, on the Arctic side of Oxford Street, and knew nothing of the marketable value of their fellow-creatures. For London has its slave-mart of men and women,—ay, and even of lords and ladies,—where people are bought and sold at conventional prices, as much as niggers in a Slave State, or Georgians in the far East.

Mrs. Ommany of Fair Oaks, and Mr. and Mrs. Braddon Branshaw of Branshaw Combe, were consequently puzzled to account for the attentions of the Armsteads and Brookdales to a bald-headed man of a certain age, and a Saturnine junior, apparently his clerk, who

arrived in a fly just before the second day's dinner; whose importation of Morning papers overpowered, by the smell of damp letterpress, the scent of heliotropes and gardenias pervading the drawing-room.—Who in the world could they be?—*A* Mr. Frere, and *a* Mr. Marsham!—Yes—the butler certainly announced "Mr. Frere and Mr. Marsham;"—to the ears of that benighted district, much as if he had announced Mr. Smith and Mr. Snooks!

Yet, as Mrs. Braddon Branshaw of Branshaw Combe observed to her daughters when Lady Armstead and Lady Brookdale had retired to the dressing-room of the former, to enjoy the ante-prandial cup of tea with which fashionable ladies damp their appetites and stimulate their spirits for the dinner-table, "there was as much fuss made about those two quizzes, as if they were county members!"

In this contemptuous estimate she was con-

firmed by the pertinacious manner in which, on the sounding of the second gong, both senior and junior planted themselves beside the poor relation in the muslin dress, who wore nothing in her hair; "a plain proof," as Mrs. Braddon Branshaw observed, "that she considered its glossy undulations a sufficient ornament."

At dinner, the party was increased by the arrival of the two chattering, beardless sons of Mrs. Ommany, who had been out cub-hunting; a deed characterised by Barton Frere in a whisper to Tiny, as barbarous and fratricidal, "*attendu que les loups ne s'entremangent pas.*" But as it was the first day of the season, they felt entitled to recount, with prodigious variations and embellishments, their feats in the field.

The elder of the Ommany cubs was, in fact, one of the Guards' ensigns, to whose inauguration reference has been already made; and as, though a little *roquet* of the most snappish description,

and the height and consistence of a walking-cane, he had figured for nearly a year in the Army List, and six months in the window of the Guards' Club, it was to him Miss Emilia Braddon Branshaw applied (as to a London man!) for information touching the mysterious nondescripts.

"The fellow with the bald head?—Can't put a name upon him—though his face is as familiar to me as the dial-plate at the Horse-guards!—He belongs to one of the best Omnibuses; and one always sees him hanging about Brookes's."

"And the other—whom I heard presented by Lady Brookdale to your mother as Mr. Marsham—"

"Not *the* Marsham, surely?" cried the young guardsman, with unconcealed amazement. "Not the man who wrote the pamphlet?"

"Oh!—an AUTHOR!" rejoined Emilia, with as scornful a smile as if the vilest odour of

Grub Street already degraded the room.—"How odd that Lady Brookdale should be so intimate with a person of that kind!"

"*That* kind?—Why, he's one of the greatest swells going!—His brother, who's in my regiment, is called Romney Marsh, because he's some relation to Lord Romney."

"But what was *this* Mr. Marsham's pamphlet about?" inquired Emilia, becoming more interested in the stranger, on learning this aristocratic connection.

"I'm sure I can't tell you. Some confounded political nonsense or other, I suppose;—one of those loose nothings not worth sixpence, that sells for a shilling. I remember *my* governor used to get his speeches printed as pamphlets, to inflict on his constituents, to bespeak custom, as auctioneers do their catalogues. I wonder what part of the play this fellow is come to act down in Somersetshire? After dinner I must go and talk to him about

N 2

Romney Marsh, who is no end of a chum of mine."

But the pamphleteer proved to be unapproachable. He had installed himself beside the lady of the house, as the nearest approach to Tiny he could accomplish without compromising himself and her; and to Lady Armstead the little *roquet* no more dared make advances, than to the Lord Chancellor on the Woolsack. Her sisters had snubbed him so severely in London ball-rooms, lest he should fasten himself on them as a partner, that he stood in great awe of the family.

For the two officials, however, there was ample room beside her sofa. The lady guests had deserted her for her sister-in-law. As if an odour of courtly sanctity exuded from her ladyship's very garments, they admired her ill-cut dowdy gown, and humbly expressed a wish for the pattern of a frightful piece of tapestry, her faded company-work, already four years in hand;—besetting her with a

thousand such little foolish questions touching the books, music, preachers, and jewellers in vogue, as might have been asked of some English traveller by the long-be-savaged Governor's lady of Tasmania or Cape Castle; till poor Lady Brookdale, who seldom found herself required to know anything, or answer anybody, became as much puzzled as the over-catechised crack pupil of a Sunday-school.

Gratefully, however, was their pre-occupation appreciated by Frere and Marsham; the discrepancy between whose agreeable conversation and the cackle of the young Ommanys rendered Lady Armstead painfully conscious that when the woodcocks and the Horsford family made their appearance at Higham Grange, the monkey-tricks and slang of her "fast" brothers might, in that stately mansion, appear somewhat out of place.

Even Tiny admitted that the officials were seen to far greater advantage amid the tranquillity of country-life, than in the feverish

pauses of their London career; where thoughtful men are silent, and those who talk most utter any opinions but their own. In Park Lane, the table-talk was apt to resemble a theatrical fencing-bout, where the chief object of the combatants is to flash their swords in the eyes of the audience.

But in quitting London, George Marsham was careful to give his officiality to the winds. He came into the country to give a feed of grass to his body and mind. His last visit to Higham Grange, during the old bachelorhood of his friend, had passed so pleasantly, aided by the not unimportant adjuncts of capital shooting, capital hunting, capital cellars, and a capital table, that he had looked forward somewhat nervously to the restraints likely to be created in the house by female domination. His baggage must be increased by the addition of starched white chokers and French-varnished boots; and "no smoking would be allowed in the company's carriages." He even

thought old Frere superfluously prosy, when, for half-a-dozen stations on their journey down, he enlarged on the merits and attractions of "Lady Armstead's fair friend." He hated the affected periphrase, "fair friend;"—and had discovered no extraordinary charm in Tiny herself, whose unfashioned simplicity was completely thrown into the shade by the smiles and diamonds of the half-dozen duchesses who lionized him as the Junius of the season,—the Coming Man who was to put an extinguisher upon Stanley and Peel.

But now, in those large, cool, uncrowded rooms, where she glided about so gracefully and so much at ease, he found every excuse for the enthusiasm of the old beau, whose compliments came out dry as the kernel of a last year's walnut.—Either she or himself was decidedly altered for the better. Her countenance, always sweet, had acquired a more thoughtful expression,—like that of one who has felt or suffered. Many tears

must have fallen from those kindly eyes since he first saw them, looking weary and inanimate, in Lady Armstead's pony-phaeton in the park. They were now flecked by lingering clouds like the sky after a storm. He would have given much—he would almost have given the authorship and fame of his pamphlet,—to discover what had befallen her since they parted in Park Lane.

CHAPTER X.

Had not the lady of Higham Grange completely outgrown and forgotten the Amy Horsford of Clevelands, she would probably have derived some amusement from the puss-in-the-corner vivacity with which her husband's official friends endeavoured to circumvent and distance each other in obtaining a place by the side of Miss Corbet;—in sitting, walking, riding, feeding, the round game after dinner, or the cozy, fire-light chat preceding it.

She was prudent enough, however, to ab-

stain from encouraging either. Tiny, if still heart-free, might safely be left to the dictates of her conscientious reason; and she sat calmly but smilingly aloof, watching the coursing match; the timid hare, and the staunch and resolute greyhounds.

The Miss Braddon Branshaws shrugged their shoulders; for, though anxiously occupied in toadying Lady Brookdale, her little daughter, her little daughter's governess, nay, even her lady's maid,—they could not but perceive that the two stars of the party had become the satellites of the poor relation; while *they* were left to the giggling boys, whom their lady-mother alone regarded as belonging to the severer sex.

They could not, however, deny that, whichever might eventually prove the conqueror, Miss Corbet was an unconscious victim. When they pursued, she did not fly; because it never occurred to her that two men of serious purposes,—the one a distinguished author, the

other a manufacturer of protocols,—could trouble themselves about an ignorant obscure girl like herself, except as the guest of their official colleague.

Little did she suspect how pretty the ignorant obscure girl was looking when assisting little Victoria Barwell to find in the map the places named in her Geography lesson; while the perpendicular Miss Strickney was taking on the terrace, under an umbrella in the rain, the morning constitutional which formed an important branch of her code of educational morality.

Not all the furbelowed dresses in the showroom of Madame Dévy Einstein,—not all the glittering bracelets in the caskets of Hancock, could have enhanced the charm of her sweet countenance and unaffected manners. She was just the sympathetic household-companion, the gentle, tender being, who seemed created to comfort the home of a harassed careworn man of business.

The indignation of Mrs. Braddon Branshaw, whose daughters she had eclipsed,—the animosity of Mrs. Ommany, of Fair Oak, whose chattering sons were reduced to silence by the lofty tone of her two adorers,—would, perhaps, have exploded, but for the patronage vouchsafed by Lady Brookdale to the granddaughter of the Rawdons of Heckington;—Grandmamma Rawdon and her knotting-shuttle still hovering like a guardian angel over the destinies of poor Tiny.

"It evidenced a very unusual degree of merit in a young lady of such tender years," Lord Brookdale sententiously observed, in reply to Mrs. Braddon Branshaw's disparaging comments, "to have attracted the attention of a man of such remarkable abilities as Mr. Marsham."

"Say, rather," added his brother-in-law, "when, without effort on her own part, a girl of small fortune and moderate connections, enslaves a practised man of the world, like

Barton Frere ; who would give his head (though a bald one) to make her his wife."

And either of the two cackling Ommanys, after hearing such a verdict pronounced by so eminent a man as Sir James Armstead, seconding a Lord of the Bedchamber, would gladly have hurried off to the feet of Miss Corbet, but for the awe in which they stood of their London rivals.

It was Marsham, meanwhile, who made most way towards the winning post. With Machiavelian tact he had discovered Miss Corbet's vulnerable point ; and whenever he could obtain her ear, regaled it with arguments concerning Colonial legislation—Negro-apprenticeship,—and other parliamentary Tropicisms so thoroughly exhausted for a person not engrossed by the interests of the Fredville Plantation, that the most patient House that ever yawned would have been counted out after the first five sentences.

Certain prolonged *tête-à-têtes*, while Tiny was taking her customary morning-walk under a sunny wall half a-mile in length, clothed with fine old Magnolia trees, a discovery of which primmed up the thin mouths of the Miss Braddon Branshaws into an all but imperceptible line, were solely occupied by a *resumé* of the import and export duties of the Island of Jamaica, which the dryest Red-tapist would have voted a bore.

"Rather slow, all this, eh, Miss Corbet?" cackled the Guardsman-brother of the Ommany-gemini,—venturing on the second day of his visit to shirk the shooting-party, apparently for the purpose of infringing on George Marsham's much-prized promenade. "I expected we should have had something stunning at Higham Grange as it is a sort of bridal party;—charades, or tableaux or post, or racing.—Instead of which, it's duller than before old Armstead married. I wish we'd your brother Romney here,

Mr. Marsham, to show them a thing or two."

"I know very little of the habits of my brother," replied the Secretary, coldly. "We do not frequent the same Clubs or the same society. But I trust that, being still little more than an Eton boy, he does not pretend to impose his tastes or opinions upon rational society."

If this constrained severity purported to banish the intruder from a walk evidently planned only for two, it proved ineffectual. The *roquet* took it all in good part.—Chaff being the modern language in which he had been advised to "go up" for examination at Sandhurst, he took it for granted, that the chaff of the barrack-room and of the Treasury Chambers, were different dialects.

"But you've a famous chance before you," he resumed, again addressing Miss Corbet. "The Turbervilles, who dine here to-day, are to have a gorgeous function next week; and

though Lady Armstead seems too ill just now to take much trouble, I'm sure my mother would chaperon you. The Turbervilles are neighbours of ours; and we mean to lend them a hand at their benefit."

"I should scarcely advise you to make the Turbervilles' acquaintance," observed Marsham, in an audible aside to Miss Corbet. "They are dreadful people."

"Why, I always understood," exclaimed young Ommany, "that they were cousins of yours?"—

"Mrs. Turberville is a cousin of my mother. But she is married to an objectionable man, and I know nothing of her."

"Well, by Jove, that beats—But I promise you, Mr. Marsham," said he, interrupting himself, "Romney Marsh is never out of their house."

"Probably. Between him and them, there may be elective affinities."

"I don't know anything about affinities.

But it was Romney who gave them the name of the rich and high-flavoured Ts."

"Rich, they certainly are. Should you visit Turberville Abbey," said he, pointedly addressing Miss Corbet,—"you will find the gold of the family oozing out in every direction where gold can be out of place. — I believe they gild the tails of their sheep and scythes of their labourers. — My father, a simple-minded man of the old school, once spent a few days with them, and assured me that not a flash invention of the *nouveauté* shops of London or Paris,—things one never sees without shrugging one's shoulders and wondering whether there are fools capable of buying them,—but he found at the Abbey."

"It certainly *is* the most beautifully-furnished house in the kingdom," said the Guardsman, misunderstanding his drift. "Romney Marsh calls it the Monte-Cristol Palace."

"The Turberville grandfather is supposed

to have been a Jew," resumed Marsham. "And the Israelitish taint is as perceptible in his gaudy tastes as in his noisy vulgarity. Turberville brags of his offspring as if he were crying his wares. There is a sharpish lad of a son, whom he is always puffing as if he were a sixteen-bladed penknife or a net of oranges."

"I'd rather buy Charley Turberville than sell him, any day of the week," retorted the Guardsman, at length losing temper. "He's the best and best-looking chap on the face of the earth. And Charley is not one of your fellows who live by their wits,—though his wits might keep him handsomely. Charley's an only son, with fifteen thousand a year hanging over his head; and the heart to spend twice as many more."

"No fear, then, that he will want backing from his friends,—though his cousins may be less alive to his merits," observed George Marsham, drily. "I believe the 'function' to

which you just now alluded, is given to commemorate his coming of age. Armstead mentioned to me, yesterday, that Higham Grange and all its contents were invited."

"Are they?—Oh! come,—that's jolly!—Then you will go, Miss Corbet?" said the poor boy, whose tender years could not imagine resistance to a ball-invitation.

"The great object it seems of the Turbervilles," observed Marsham, intercepting her reply,—"is to secure the Brookdales. My worthy cousins have a profound veneration for the merest fringe on the uttermost garment of royalty. They probably expect Lord Brookdale to make his appearance with a lion on one shoulder, and a unicorn on the other. How disappointed they will be when they see such a quiet, inostensible little couple,—whose small voices will be drowned by the full-bodied roar of Mr. Turberville, like Sam Patch in the fall of Niagara.—At what are you smiling?" added he, in a whisper, to

poor Tiny,—trusting perhaps that the sudden brightness of her countenance was caused by his pleasantries.

"I was thinking how like you speak, sometimes, to my cousin Willy!"

"The cousin with whom I heard my friend Frere accuse you of taking twilight-walks in Hyde Park?"

"The cousin with whom I took a single walk this spring."

"And who is coming, perhaps, to the Monte-Cristol-Palace ball," he continued,—perceiving that he had at last succeeded in snubbing the young standard-bearer into lagging behind.

"Alas, no!" replied Miss Corbet with grave frankness,—"for I am fonder of *my* cousins than you appear to be of yours. Willy Enmore has sailed for the West Indies. Willy Enmore is now in Jamaica."

The young ensign had not received half so unkind a cut as this. — To have been

beguiled into those trite Essays on Abolition and the Sugar Duties, by one so seeming-simple as Miss Corbet, was indeed a settler to a man who fancied himself able to pull the strings of an administration, and fill or empty the gallery of the House of Commons!

When the Turbervilles made their appearance that evening, they experienced the usual reaction that awaits people unjustly aspersed. There was nothing in their manners, dress, or appearance to justify the sarcasms of George Marsham; who belonged to the modern school, only too numerous, of people who pretend to enhance their personal consequence by crying down their relations.

Mr. Turberville did not bawl or brawl as predicted; and his wife, though, according to the dictum of the Guards' Club, she might be "rich and high-flavoured," proved a pleasant ladylike woman, who was a considerable addition to the party. That Mr. Marsham, if an amusing companion, was a very ill-natured

critic, was clearly apparent; and after noticing the cousinly cordiality with which he was saluted by the new-comers, it would have required a very large amount of West Indian policy to replace him in the good opinion of Miss Corbet.

That the handsome and mannerly young man whose majority was on the eve of celebration, was the origin of his cousin's uncharitableness, did not occur to her; for, still believing Lady Armstead's assertion, that "George Marsham was over-head-in-ears in love with her dear Tiny," to be one of the many coinages of her fanciful brain, she was not on her guard against his jealousy.—But she *did* infer, from a certain strength of determination latent in the dark eyes of Charles Turberville, that in *his* presence his parents must not be disparaged.

Earnestly therefore did she hope that the cackling little Guardsman would not, inadvertently or designedly, repeat to the best

fellow on the face of the earth the malicious strictures uttered by the bitter brother of Romney Marsh. Not that the dispenser of social poisons did not *deserve* to be checked. But because any incident tending to "break the good meeting with most admired disorder" might be injurious to her friend Amy.

She was accordingly far more attentive to the Turberville family,—son included,—than she usually was to strangers,—unless of the degree of Miss Strickney; an urbanity attributed both by her admirers and her enemies in the house, to the influence of Turberville Abbey.

"Like the rest of them,—like the rest of them!—" muttered George Marsham, as he arranged in the glass his supererogative muslin tie. "Jamaica is already swept out of the map, by a Somersetshire park and a mansion in Belgrave Square!"—Just as Barton Frere was at the same moment desponding by comparing, at *his* toilet, his sallow face and nude caput,

with the Grecian head of the handsome Charley, who stood among them like an Apollo, with his quiver full of arrows.

By the enlargement of the dinner-party, the soldier Ommany was able to accomplish his long-coveted purpose of taking in Miss Corbet to dinner; and as it was as much his object to obtain a place at table among the juveniles as it had been that of Marsham and Frere to station themselves where English was spoken instead of slang, Tiny found herself next to Mr. Turberville and Emilia Braddon Branshaw;—a position which enabled her to admire with what cheerful goodnature he submitted to be courted and cross-questioned.—From his answers, she obtained a glimpse of the reverse of the tapestry so maliciously distorted by George Marsham.

"I hear there are to be a thousand people at your ball on the 15th," said the young lady, in a tone of gratulation.

"A thousand? I trust not—for the sake of

the dancers,—of whom I hope you will be one,—" he replied; "for our rooms are neither large nor lofty. The 'thousand' you have heard mentioned, probably alluded to the neighbouring poor, who are to be 'beefed and aled' all the morning, in marquees in the park. My dear old father, aware that I am never likely to set the Thames on fire, is going to do his best, by blaze of bonfires and spill of beer, to make my existence heard of in the county."

"I am quite sure there is no occasion for any effort of the kind," replied Miss Emilia, with a caressing smile. "But we are not the less obliged to Mr. Turberville for the charming entertainment we are promised. Mamma has been endeavouring to persuade Lord and Lady Brookdale to stay for it, and to sleep at Branshaw Combe, which is so much nearer than the Grange."

"Stay for it?—Why the engagement is nearly as old as I am.—It was to be here on

the 15th that they made their present visit. Before her marriage, Lady Brookdale was the dearest friend of my mother. It was through that connection that our cousin, George Marsham, was first introduced to Sir James Armstead."

There was nothing in the fact or the relationship, to interest the fair Emilia; though she continued to smile as approvingly into the face of her informant as if he were describing some beautiful scene or noble action. But to Tiny, the statement afforded infinite discouragement. Was this the way in which people of the world disowned their relations, slandered their benefactors, and related plausible anecdotes without a grain of foundation? Could not even the fine abilities of this accomplished Mr. Marsham raise him above the meanness of decrying those to whom he did not wish to appear under an obligation? She was shocked! He might *talk* like her cousin Willy. But between their natures, she

thanked Heaven, there was not a particle of resemblance. The official man was as cold and cruel as he was clever. It was not to *him* she could have confided the prospects of her schoolboy brother!—

The evening, a rare event at Higham Grange, was devoted to music. Mr. Turberville, not having had his inborn taste for tune dinned out of him by the practising of daughters, was one of those who never find themselves in company with misses in muslin gowns, without insisting that the piano should be opened. He knew that Mrs. Braddon Branshaw would be thankful to him for affording a signal for the duets in which her daughters excelled; and the Ommany lads were equally grateful for anything that interrupted the "eternal holding forth of those stupid old fogeys, who fancied themelves licensed, in parliament or out, to deal in prose."

But what disconcerted the licensed prosers far more than the dislocation of their evening,

was to find Miss Corbet take part in the concert.—She, who so shrank from exhibition,—she, of whose musical talents *they* were not even aware,—evidently thought it worth while to display them for the captivation of the "rich, high-flavoured Ts." After the Miss Braddon Branshaws had thundered their loudest Thalberg, with an energy and emphasis which the instrument could scarcely bear without a groan, Mrs. Ommany endeavoured to coax the younger of her cubs into favouring them with one of Verdi's songs. And so eagerly did she press the fair musicians present to accompany the mellifluous guardsman, that at length Lady Armstead appealed to the assistance of her friend.

"There are sets and sets of Verdi's songs in your green portfolio, dear Tiny!" said she. And the book was accordingly sent for, and "La Mia Letizia" sung, and accompanied in a style that drew from Mr. Turberville an enthusiastic encore.

That a young lady possessing a large collection of vocal music, must be herself a songstress, was sufficiently apparent to expose her to the solicitations of the old Melomane; nor would young Ommany hear of her leaving the piano, without paying the usual tax. She did not, however, draw upon the resources of the green music-book. One of cousin Willy's German ballads,—a novelty to the whole party,—was so simply and thrillingly "said" rather than sung, as to prove that, however obtuse she might have been in conjugating her verbs under his tuition, she had learned to imitate the exquisite grace and modulation which distinguished his vocal performances.

Very general was the applause. Some praised the sweetness of her voice,—some the expressiveness of her style;—while Sir James secretly applauded the discretion which had so long kept him in ignorance that he possessed a musical inmate, and Lord Brookdale gave the finishing touch to the delight of the

country-neighbours, by stating that he "had heard that charming melody at Windsor Castle," from some Serene Highness, whose name he quoted in an accent which would have puzzled the oldest inhabitant of the Holy Roman Empire.

To the real enthusiasm excited by the song, succeeded the pretended enthusiasm with which real sentiments are usually exaggerated to fill up the vacuum of society. The young ladies, more especially, indulged in magnanimous ecstacies; choosing to be thought affected, rather than envious or cold. The Braddon Branshaws implored poor Tiny's permission to copy that "divine little ballad," the name of which the hope of the Ommanys was inscribing in a small morocco notecase (which he hoped would pass for a betting-book), that he might send for it by the morrow's post.

"I will teach it to both of you, as I learned it myself,—by ear," said Miss Corbet, good-

humouredly. "I never saw it in print. It was taught me by my cousin, Mr. Enmore."

"*Enmore?*—Not Arthur?—Not my Eton chum?"—exclaimed Charles Turberville, who, stationed behind his more demonstrative sire, had been hitherto a silent auditor. "Surely Arthur Enmore is no musician?—Like Fusboz, 'he has not got a singing face.'"

"Of that you are a better judge than myself," replied Miss Corbet, laughing, "for the face of my cousin Arthur I have not seen these six years. It was his younger brother, who, on his recent return from Dresden, taught me a few German ballads."

"The younger brother, in whose favour he was disinherited?" persisted Mr. Turberville. "I heard something about it from Bob Horsford, whom I met in Paris last spring. When I found that my old friend Enmore had changed his name to Rawdon, I concluded it was for a fortune, and was about to wish him joy. But Horsford advised me to defer my congratula-

tions; and told me that, so far from being better off than he used to be, Arthur had been *volé comme dans un bois*."

"Mr. Horsford is brother to Lady Armstead," said Tiny, gravely, "and I will therefore make no remark on the accuracy of his information. But perhaps you have not heard of the terrible accident which befel my cousin Arthur after you parted in Paris?"

And on Charles Turberville's admitting both his ignorance and interest in the matter, she proceeded to give him, in a lower and more confidential voice, the history of the Interlaken misfortune.

The long and low conversation that ensued between them, to which the animated gestures and exclamations of Arthur's Eton friend seemed to assign extraordinary importance, certainly warranted the group collected at the further end of the room in believing that Miss Corbet was taking extraordinary pains to ingratiate herself with the handsome heir of

Turberville Abbey. Long before the evening was over, the little guardsman had begun to think him something short of being the best fellow on the face of the earth; while George Marsham, who was pretending to skim the leading articles of the evening papers, which had just made their appearance, might have been overheard muttering between his teeth his usual diatribe against the sex of—"All alike, by Jove!—*all* just alike!"—

CHAPTER XI.

A PARTY assembled in a country-house, possesses a singular faculty for maturing loves or hates. Half-a-dozen weeks' acquaintance in London, effects less than half the number of days will accomplish among people sleeping under the same roof, and assembling three times a day round the same table.

Before the Turbervilles quitted Higham Grange, they had warmed up even the coldest of its inmates into the warmest interest in

their impending fête. There was something so cordial and so genuine in the joy of the father exulting to see his "noble fellow of a son" attain man's estate, that it carried away every heart in the same direction.—So far from being actuated by love of pomp or display, all the preparations in progress at the Abbey were based upon the principle of creating for everybody within reach a happy day, on that which confirmed the parental triumph of its master and mistress. All the dukes in the land might have signified their wish to be present at the ball, without making either of the "rich and high-flavoured Ts" a particle more conscious of the goodness of Providence in granting them such a son.

Lady Armstead began to regret that the woodcocks did not make their appearance in Somersetshire a week or two earlier; so certain was she that Flo. and Carry would have enjoyed the brilliant entertainment impending; and though, at her husband's

entreaty, she renounced her own intention to join the party, either from Branshaw Combe or Fair Oak, (for the better certainty that twenty-one years later in the history of the world, a similar celebration might take place at Higham Grange,) she insisted that Tiny should accompany the Brookdales to the ball.

Aware, now that their acquaintance had deepened into friendship, how large a portion of Miss Corbet's allowance found its way to Grenfield House in the shape of gifts for the boys or their mother, she had taken care to provide from London such a dress for her young friend as Sir James deemed indispensable to the occasion. It was, in fact, to be his own cadeau to his pretty guest; and he contrived to lose a bet to her which justified the offering;—what the French call a "discrétion,"—the object lost, depending on the selection of the loser.

But the most singular part of the affair was that Marsham and Frere, though overdue in

Whitehall, and having largely overstayed at the Grange the date of their invitation, had accepted the strenuous invitation of the Turbervilles. The sarcastic pamphleteer was perhaps curious to ascertain by ocular demonstration whether, like the *Menteur véridique* of the stage, his ill-nature concerning the Abbey and its inmates would be verified by their exorbitant magnificence; and old Frere anxious to satisfy himself that he had been cut out by irresistible advantages. At all events, to the ball they were going. Tiny, in the airy white tulle ball-dress trimmed with clematis, of whose arrival her girlish exclamations of delight and gratitude had duly apprised them, would float before their eyes, a charming vision; — perhaps for the last time—before they beheld her in the matronly dignities which they inferred to be the object of her ambition.

Most country-neighbourhoods contain a regnant Thane or Grandee; proprietor of some

noble castle or court which serves as regulation-post to its minor morals, and whereon floats a flag when the family is in residence; the female partner of whose honours maintains the privilege of sitting nearest, at every dinner-party, to the master of the house, the turbot and the haunch,—of opening every ball and every railway, and heading every local subscription.

But there happened to be no Right Honourable Countess of Anything, either with or without Lady-daughters, within reach of Turberville Abbey; and there being consequently no vested rights or dignities to interfere with his inclinations, the young hero of the birthday-fête was free to choose the prettiest girl or handsomest woman among the guests. Nor were his parents, in spite of George Marsham's uncousinly insinuations, the people to thwart his choice. That he had already fixed upon Miss Corbet as his partner, might be a compliment to her own

attractions or to the position held in the district by her hosts. But that Mr. Turber-ville fully approved the selection, was mani-fested at the moment of their departure from Higham Grange, by the loud voice in which, on taking leave of the party, he laid his injunctions on Tiny not to bother Sir James Armstead's head-gardener to force roses or camellias for her bouquet; as she would find one awaiting her at Turberville Abbey on the 15th, such as had never yet been seen in the county.

So vociferous, indeed, was the jolly old gentleman while shaking her by the hand, that the portraits of the Welsh judges and Dutch admirals hanging in the old oak cor-ridor where his farewell was spoken, vibrated in their frames, while the Braddon Branshaw damsels, who had been hoarding up griev-ances throughout their visit, puckered their brows into an additional contraction of ill-nature, at finding what they had long

regarded as their kingdom, taken from them.

Next day, — the one still intervening between the expectant neighbourhood and the monster festivity,—the party assembled at the Grange dispersed to their several homes; and though both Lady Brookdale and Tiny were thus deprived of the incense which, so far from turning their heads, only caused them to ache, the clearing of strangers from the gallery was hailed as a relief. Even the censorious pamphleteer was forced to admit that Miss Corbet, amid the distinctions showered upon her, remained pure from all self-consciousness. As to poor Lady Brookdale, she looked only a little stupider than usual.

They were sitting together chatting by pleasant firelight in the library; waiting for the dressing-gong to sound, and congratulating themselves that, like the Empire of France at the Vienna Congress, they were "reduced

to their just integrity;" when a grating of wheels on the gravel, and the clang of the hall bell, announced an arrival.

No one was expected. No one was wanted. Everybody began to speculate concerning the new comer; and Lady Armstead thoughtlessly exclaimed that it must be one of those foolish Ommany boys, or Mr. Turberville, come back to look for his heart or his walking-stick, carelessly left behind.

The butler speedily made his appearance for the solution of their doubts. But instead of throwing open the door with his usual portly majesty to announce a guest, he glided up to Miss Corbet, and informed her, in a mysterious whisper, that there was "a person in the hall wishing to speak to her."

"I told you so, Tiny!" cried Lady Armstead, who had overheard the communication. "I wonder which of them it is?— Pray let him be shown in here—We are all going up to dress."

But Tiny, in whom the grave demeanour of the butler had excited different surmises, was already out of the room. She felt convinced that the messenger was from home. —She sadly feared that something was amiss.

Scarcely had she followed him into the dimly-lighted passage leading from the bright hall to the offices, when a pair of rough arms were thrown round her neck,—certainly not those of either of the visitors predicted by her friend Amy; and for a moment, she was more startled than pleased by so impetuous a greeting. That the proprietor of the rough arms was sobbing violently, did not tend to reassure her; but the ejaculation of "Oh! Miss Sophia, my dear!" which soon became intelligible, satisfied her that the individual so entirely cloaked as to have been at first unrecognisable, was no other than her former nurse;—the self-same Susan who, to old Mrs. Rawdon of Harley Street, had described her nursling as "so turribly put upon,"—and

who had subsequently become wife and widow of the Grenfield parish-clerk.

The good woman had not, however, diverged so far from her orbit only to sob and ejaculate. Her errand, and it was a sad one, was quickly told. Mrs. Corbet, from whom her step-daughter had heard the preceding day, in her usual crepuscular state of health and spirits, had been suddenly attacked with spasms of the heart, from which the worst results were anticipated. The only audible words she had since articulated, conveyed a request to see her own dear Tiny before she died.

As a safe if not suitable escort, Susan Moore had been instantly summoned and despatched by Mr. Corbet, to bring home his daughter; and in almost as short a time as it had taken to make the explanation, and long before the fly-horses and driver considered themselves sufficiently the better for Higham cheer to renew their start, Tiny's preparations were accomplished.—She was wild to be off.—For

some time past, she had been reproaching herself for her protracted absence from home; and but that both her father and Mrs. Corbet seemed to urge its prolongation, she would have returned to them at once from London, instead of accompanying the Armsteads into Somersetshire. If she now proved too late to see her stepmother alive, she felt that she should never forgive herself.

All this was rapidly explained to the sympathising Amy; and so evident was the sincerity of her grief and anxiety in their hurried farewell, that Lady Armstead did not venture to allude to the Abbey fête, or the regrets her absence would occasion. All she could do was to assist in wrapping up the traveller, for her hasty night-journey; and when Sir James placed her in the fly by the side of her ungainly chaperon, he took leave of her with almost affectionate concern. He knew all that his wife would lose by her absence. He knew all *he* should lose, and all he should

risk, if *her* companionship were to be replaced by that of Flo. or Carry!

Great was the regret for her absence and its cause, expressed round the dinner-table. Barton Frere, who, ever since the Turberville ball was in perspective, had cheerfully predicted a heavy fall of snow, now darkened his prognostication into a severe frost, and was certain Miss Corbet would take cold. The foresighted Lady Brookdale, almost as much impressed by the beauty of the ball-dress prepared for her as Susan Moore, who had seen it extended in her nursling's dressing-room, was full of regrets that it should be wasted,—"for if her stepmother died, a three months' mourning would throw it out of fashion." While her lord, after expressing his conviction that their amiable young friend, in her affliction, had not given a thought to the ball, added, that the person he was most sorry for was young Turberville, who was evidently desperately smitten.

"She would make him a charming wife," he said. "So different from that unfortunately increasing class of fast young ladies!—The girls of the present day really indulge in as much slang as their brothers. I heard of one of them, in Leicestershire, leaping the Whissendine brook:—of another, in the Highlands, landing a salmon or bringing down a stag;—of a third, at Cowes, sailing her father's yacht for the Cup;—and am inclined to exclaim—'*Ne sutor ultra crepidam*,' or no young lady beyond her petticoats!"

"Miss Corbet is, as you say, a truly feminine creature," rejoined Sir James, ever conscientious in his verdict. "But I cannot agree with you that she would be a good wife for young Turberville. No one admires her more than I do. But I would rather she married my brother, than my son. Pliant and amenable as she is, a man whose character is formed, and who might be trusted with the modelling of hers, would be better for her than a young

fellow who would make a slave of her, and of whom she would make nothing in return."

"Who can tell what any girl of her age will make of herself, or anybody?" cried George Marsham,—secretly of opinion that a blue-eyed slave, with Tiny's sweet voice and temper, would be one of the most acceptable vouchsafings of Providence.—"Scarcely eighteen,—ignorant of the world,—as dependent for her future qualities on the hands into which she may fall, as a plant on the soil and aspect in which it is cultivated!"

"Well, I'm sure I hope the hands will be good, and the aspect favourable," rejoined the good-natured Lord Brookdale. "I never saw a young lady whom I should better like my daughter to resemble, or my son to make his wife."

And Barton Frere, the slight tinge in whose sallow cheeks, and slight tremor in whose usually well-disciplined voice was perhaps attributable to a few extra glasses added to

his stint of sherry by way of consolation for Tiny's departure—secretly rejoiced that, under such circumstances, the future Lord Brookdale was still busy with his Delectus and brandy-balls, in the Lower school at Harrow.

The young traveller, meanwhile, was far more intent on those towards whom she was journeying, than those she left behind. There had been a strong tug at her heart in parting from Amy; whom she had formerly liked as an acquaintance, but now loved as a friend. Not from recent discovery of superior qualities or unexpected endowments in Lady Armstead; but from the motive that originates most human friendships,—mutual acts of kindness, and mutual sentiments of gratitude. Both Amy and her husband had been undeviatingly thoughtful for her comfort; and, accustomed as she was at home to study the requirements of an invalid, her affectionate attendance had begun to be indispensable to her ailing friend. But, mile by mile, station by station, these regrets

gave way to the impression that she was still more wanted at Grenfield; and by the time the mail-train reached London, at an hour which in October is still night, she would not hear of accomplishing her father's plan that she should take a few hours' rest in Hertford Street. Proceeding at once to the King's Cross Station, she reached home by day-break; and after the first painful moments of family greeting, derived some consolation from learning that Mrs. Corbet had passed a good night, and was anxiously expecting her.

A respite was necessary to regain her composure. But how compose herself, with two boisterous boys besetting her with caresses? —Alfred had been brought home from school to take leave of his mother; and, too long accustomed to see her an invalid, to believe that death was come at last, was far too much gratified by an unexpected visit to Grenfield, Edgar, and Tiny, to be duly impressed by the sad occasion of his visit.

"How you are grown, Tiny!—Quite a woman,—and a pretty one, too!" was his first exclamation on seeing his sister. "It was very dull without you here, last holidays; —and one day, when papa and I met the Horsford tribe riding on Hetherly Common, they insisted on wishing us joy, and declared you were going to be married to your cousin Willy,—that stunning fellow, who came to see me at Aldenham, and tipped me so famously. But papa was very angry: and when they rode off, called them no end of names, and bad me not repeat to any one the nonsense they had been talking."

"But tell me about dear mamma, Alfred," sobbed Miss Corbet, drying his chubby face, on which her tears had been falling. "Has Dr. Ashe been here to-day?—Is my father still in her room?"

"Dr. Ashe slept in the house, last night; and papa is always up-stairs. He makes Edgar and me take our boots off before we go

into the room. But don't cry, Tiny, you know how often poor mamma has been ill before, and how well you always used to nurse her."

"And I am come to nurse her again, Alfred; and we will all do our best. You boys must not jump about or make a noise. We must all—*all* do our best."

But the best poor Tiny found to do just then, was to cry her eyes out on her brother's shoulder. Something in the aspect of the servants, and atmosphere of the house, seemed to warn her that deeper misery was at hand.

Hard indeed was it for her to govern her emotions when, on approaching the bedside of the sufferer, she saw the gleam of joy that lighted up Mrs. Corbet's wan wasted face. No mother could have breathed more tenderly in her ear the faint words,—"My child, my child!"—than did her father's dying wife.

Wanting courage to witness their meeting,

Mr. Corbet had crept from the room to hide the tears which were no shame to his manly nature; and Tiny could therefore express her almost indignant regrets at not having been sooner sent for.

"It has all been so sudden," feebly murmured her stepmother, twining her thin, cold fingers round the trembling hand she was holding. "My summons, after so many years of suffering, was still unlooked for. But for such a summons,—such a parting, darling child,—who is ever prepared?—And among many mercies vouchsafed me, Tiny, is that I have lived to see your face again! I wanted to thank you for all your daughter-like love and goodness to me; and to ask you—to ask you—" she paused. Tears choked her utterance—big tears, which, in spite of all her patient self-control, would not—could not be repressed.

"You wanted to ask me?" faltered Miss Corbet, trembling, lest the struggle of these

emotions should be too much for the invalid; and that she might pass away without explaining her last wishes.

"That you would promise to take my place as a mother to the boys. Your father loves his children dearly. But I have wasted his life, Tiny. My sickliness has encroached upon his time. He has lost the habit of looking after his family. Everything here has been going wrong since you have been away. Promise me that you will give those boys an orderly home, and undertake the duties to which my poor weak frame was unequal."

Firmly, though in a low, sad voice, was the promise given.

"I ought never to have left you, mamma. I was selfish, foolish, worldly-minded——"

"No, no! You felt with the feelings natural to your age. But now, with such a responsibility on your head, you must feel with the feelings of *mine;* with the patience of a wife, and pity of a mother. You must bear

with the boys when they are troublesome,—with your father when he is careless and procrastinating. You must think for them all,—you must act for them all. In so poor a house, darling, there is much to be borne,—much to be considered. No time for play-work at Grenfield!" said she, endeavouring to smile, and fondly patting the hand that was clasped in her own.

Did Mrs. Corbet imagine that, in the lapse of less than a year's absence, Tiny had forgotten all this? Or did the developed beauty and grace of her stepdaughter alarm her dying eyes with the fear that her former humble duties as teacher and housekeeper, were already outgrown?—Alas! the motive of her appeal was soon apparent.

"We heard last summer that you were engaged to be married to William Enmore?" added Mrs. Corbet, after pausing for a time to gather strength.

"Had it been so, dearest mamma, you

would have heard it first from myself. There was no foundation for the report."

"Thank God!—I earnestly thank God!" murmured Mrs. Corbet, raising the hand of her stepdaughter fervently to her lips. "Not alone for selfish reasons;—though to have you settle in the West Indies, out of reach and out of sight of poor Corbet and the boys, was a terrible consideration. But we dreaded the thought of your marrying Reginald Enmore's son. Never was there a more cruel husband, or more ferocious man. No good can come of such a race!"

"Not quite a charitable conclusion, surely, mother?—Children do not always take after their parents."

"Oftener than otherwise. And those boys of the Enmores seem to have afforded early indications that their father's blood was warm in their veins. I have heard even *you*, Tiny, as a child, speak of them with terror."

"Most schoolboys are rough."

"But not *cruel*,—not *wicked!*"—

"Neither, I assure you, either was, nor is, my cousin Willy."

"You *are* engaged to him, then, Tiny? You *are* attached to him?"—

"There has never been the smallest question of love between us. On the contrary, Willy openly professes his inability to like me otherwise than as a cousin."

"His father was a bitter enemy to your mother; and poor Mrs. Corbet feared as much as she disliked him. It was the greatest relief to her when he went to settle at Fredville. His violence was the terror of the whole family. Oh, Tiny! if you did but know how I trembled when I thought of your being carried off to Jamaica, as Mrs. Enmore was, to waste her youth in an unwholesome climate, with a savage to embitter her life. But my fears are over now, darling. You would not, at such a moment, deceive me;—nay, at no moment have you ever deceived

me! From a child you were all truth and honesty. And now, kiss me once more, darling, and bid me good bye.—I have done too much."

The effect of the sedatives which had afforded her a night's rest and strength for her much coveted interview with her stepdaughter, was giving way. The pangs of her agonizing malady again made themselves felt. Though she strictly forbad that Tiny should be re-admitted to her room, to be pained by the sight of her sufferings, within an hour she was again almost frantic from torture. But it was not to last long. When Dr. Ashe arrived, he came only to take a final leave. Before evening, she was at rest.

From that moment, Miss Corbet, though overcome with fatigue and sorrow, entered upon the duties of the sacred mission entrusted to her. She endeavoured to recal all that had been done in Harley Street, at the death of her grandmother. She took care that the

heavy sleep into which her father had fallen after his prolonged vigils, should not be disturbed. She comforted the terror-stricken boys, to whom the shadow of death was a fearful mystery. She relieved the labours of the overtasked servants. But above all, she prayed fervently that peace might be with the dead;—with herself, strength to replace her in that desolate home.

For desolate indeed it was. Though the duties of the moment were too urgent to admit of susceptibility to trivial annoyances, she could not but feel, during the silent solitary hours that ensued, not only the painful contrast between the house of feasting and the house of mourning, but the change from a large well-regulated establishment, and quiet, spacious, well-warmed, well-lighted house, to the poor neglected dwelling where every sound was audible,—where warmth, and light, and attendance must be strictly economised,—where every wish met with an obstacle, and

even breath and movement had to be calculated. There, duty was no longer a name. As the poor dead wife had observed—no leisure for play-work at Grenfield !—

Her perception of all this, and the severe contrasts of light and shade through which she had been hurried, preserved her at least from slighter repinings ; and by such vicissitudes is the human character formed, and the human mind strengthened, more than by years of abstract study or ordinary experience.

The vision of Mirza, committed to memory, would not have taught her half so much as her miserable lonely watch at the feet of the quiet dead ; the woman who had lived a life of suffering, in all patience, piety, and resignation, and died humbly and hopefully the death of the just.

"That girl of Corbet's has grown up a pearl of price," said Dr. Ashe to Mrs. Horsford,—to one of whose finger-aches he was administering, shortly afterwards ; "thoughtful, loving,

self-denying,—a very angel in the house!—I went there once or twice before the funeral, to see whether neighbourly help was wanting. Nothing!—She had provided money, sense, energy—all that poor Corbet himself would have been unable to supply.—It makes me half repent having lived a bachelor all my days, to see him so watched over by such a gem of a daughter—!"

CHAPTER XII.

Winter is a dreary time to be sorry in.—In the gladder season of the year, the sunshine and summer air which invite, nay, almost compel to out-door exercise, bring healing to the soul. But the man who has to ponder over his griefs and bereavements in a smoky parlour, overlooking a garden and paddock smothered in snow, without books to cheer him or philosophy to sustain, with a sorrowing child hanging round his knees, and

the knowledge that his motherless school-boy is fretting at a distance, has indeed cause to bless the kindly companionship of such a daughter as the one in whom Mr. Corbet was beginning to find far more of "Sophia" than of "Tiny."

She was a woman now,—a comfort,—a solace. She was what he remembered her mother when she first won his affections, before Rawdon-of-Heckington-ism had tyrannised over her fate or cankered her nature.

Not that he was of a turn of mind to remain long inconsolable. As readily as his second wife had replaced in his heart the lost mother of Tiny, did Tiny replace his second wife. He was the sort of purposeless facile being, which, like certain plants, attaches itself to the nearest object,—stick or stone, or noble tree. That his daughter was well supplied with money, and that the household was better paid and organised than it had been for many a year, provoked neither surprise nor anxiety. Her rich aunt had probably done her duty by her

sister's child. The couple of hundred pounds which the poor girl's earnest supplications had wrung from her trustee, out of the savings of her minority, passed with Henry Corbet as the careless gift of his sister-in-law!

His sister-in-law,—from whom not so much as a decent expression of sympathy had been elicited by the notification of Mrs. Corbet's death! In answer to her niece's letter, written in deep affliction, to announce the sad event, she crudely expressed her opinion that it must be a happy release for herself and all her family.—Sixteen long years had not obtained her forgiveness for the precipitancy with which Mr. Corbet had chosen to replace her sister; or the stupid contentedness with which he had subsided from Heckington Hall to his hovel at Grenfield. Her pride and her resentments were alike unappeasable: and she alluded with far greater interest to the influenza prevailing just then at St. Leonards, by which Harding and Parkins were laid up, than to the decease of

the poor woman who had proved so fond a stepmother to her sister's child.

That to her sons, or their whereabout, she should not advert, was, therefore, the less surprising. Still, poor Tiny was of opinion that a few words announcing Arthur's restoration to health, or Willy's safe arrival in Jamaica, would have been a more rational addition to Mrs. Enmore's measured letter of condolence, than the history of Parkins's cough.

It was not from that quarter that a ray of light was to brighten the gloom of her present existence. There was far less of kindness in Mrs. Enmore's mode of addressing her than before her visit to Hertford Street; the old lady probably still resenting the ascendancy she had obtained over her cousin.

But for her brother Alfred's revelation of the report circulated by the Horsfords, Tiny would have expressed without hesitation, to Willy himself, her anxiety to hear of his welfare, and of the fruition of his plans for the

benefit of his people and estates. But now, it would have seemed a partial forfeiture of her pledge to the dead. Either she must write clandestinely, which she considered unworthy of herself; or by writing openly, and placing her letter in the postbag, she might give pain to her father. All communication, therefore, was cut off between herself and that heart's-companion, who, during the boyhood of Alfred and Edgar, seemed entitled to a brother's place in her regard.

She endeavoured to think as little of him as possible.—The books he had given her, choice selections from his store and inscribed with her name, had been forwarded to Grenfield by Mrs. Enmore. But from these, she studiously turned away; except at *very* leisure hours, as a reward for household industry, after revising long-neglected lists, assisting in a fresh supply of clothes for her father and the boys, and taking care that the rents in the house-linen were no longer

darned with packthread. Then, in some cozy half hour, when little Edgar's noise was stilled in bed, and her father was dozing quietly by the fireside in his old arm-chair, between the three cups of tea which thus prolonged filled up his evening, she was free to take up her beloved square Leipsick volumes; —her Uhland and Tieck; of which a burst of reminiscent tears occasionally blotted the pages.—Were they dedicated to the memory of the departed sufferer, whose cold sofa was now wheeled back to the wall?

It was some comfort that, in this gloomy interval, she was undisturbed by the officious kindness of neighbours. Clevelands was deserted. The Horsfords were in Somersetshire; and she was left to the unmolested discharge of her duties. Of these, one of the most painful was the distribution between her stepmother's faithful attendants, of the presents which Mr. Corbet felt to be their due; and though it would have been far more agreeable

to the delicate-minded girl to whom he delegated the task, to commit to the flames the poor old shawls and gowns so grievously familiar to her eyes as to seem a very portion of the dead, the thing must be done. Though to *her* it appeared sacrilege to touch these homely objects, reflection reminded her that were such hoards to be rendered sacred, the surface of the earth would scarcely contain them; and that the Almighty, who has decreed the rapid decay of the very bodies we inhabit, would not sanction our clinging to the trivial objects which, in life-time, we fancy so much our own.

It was a chilly day in January which she devoted to the task. The landscape without, under the influence of a black frost, looked like a vast burial ground; while the sky and atmosphere were obscured by impending snow. How desolate seemed the deserted chamber she was compelled to visit! How sad it was to be opening, one after another,

the depositories of the kindly soul whose hoards had been so few; and so little cared for, except as a resource for others still poorer than herself.

There was but one drawer of the wardrobe kept locked; one which Tiny never remembered to have seen open, and of which she now found the key labelled and deposited in the innermost recess of Mrs. Corbet's bureau. This, even now, she hesitated to open; and was on the point of going in search of her father, to refer the question to him; when, recollecting his earnest entreaty that he might be spared all participation in the task he had besought his daughter to undertake, she took courage. Greatly to her surprise, she found, on opening the drawer, that it contained several sealed parcels addressed to herself; carefully preserved among strips of Russia leather and bags of lavender, and formally inscribed as—"The property of Sophia Corbet."

Besides a small jewel-casket, there was an old-fashioned red-morocco desk,' with several Indian cere-cloths containing cachmeres and valuable point-lace; evidently derived from the Rawdons, and scrupulously preserved for Sophia Corbet the younger, to pass into her hands on her marriage, or on attaining her majority.

The jewel-box, of which the dainty gold-key was in the lock, contained some valuable diamonds, and a string of pearls of great beauty and value. Not family jewels of the Rawdons of Heckington, which were heir-loom, and deposited with the trustees; but a bequest inherited by Mrs. Corbet from a wealthy godmother, a collateral of the family, and, as personalty, the legal property of her husband.

More than once during her grandmother's lifetime, Tiny had been questioned by Mrs. Rawdon as to what had become of these jewels; and on her professing entire ignorance,

she had been hurt by the old lady's bitter rejoinder of—"Presented, of course, by Henry Corbet to his second wife; or, more probably, sold to defray the expenses of his beggarly household."—And now that she saw with her eyes the beauty and value of those pearls, and knew, by her recently-acquired insight into the family affairs, to what shifts her poor father had been driven for money, and had yet spared the deposit which he chose to regard as her rightful inheritance, she could not help feeling that the son of the Grenfield yeoman and the daughter of the Grenfield curate had proved nobler and more delicate in their generation than the grudging grandees of Heckington Hall.

Without dwelling a moment on the beautiful workmanship of the old-fashioned bouquet and stomacher of brilliants, and the lustre of the oriental pearls,—objects in which the opulent classes of England used to invest their surplus wealth, before they adopted their present

vulgar passion for gilded furniture and tawdry bric-a-brac,—she determined that if, in the course of the three years still to elapse of her minority, she encountered any difficulty on the part of her guardian in obtaining pecuniary advances, these jewels should be appropriated to the benefit of the generous father to whom they rightfully belonged.

But the desk,—the desk, open, like the jewel-box, and inscribed with her name,—what was to be done with it? When the last drawer had been emptied, when the weeping servants had been called in, and with suitable injunctions requested in Mr. Corbet's name to take possession of the wearing-apparel of her to whom they had been so zealously devoted, Tiny hastened from the room, the very atmosphere of which seemed to cut cold into her heart, and deposited in her own the treasures of which she had so unexpectedly come into posession.

Not the rich shawls,—not the Alençon lace

as fine as a cobweb,—not the diamonds and rubies, and iris-tinted pearls,—for no one stood less in need than Sophia Corbet, of the Scriptural injunction—"Take heed, and beware of covetousness." But it seemed as if, by contact with these things, the unknown mother of whom she had thought so often and so often been forbidden to talk, were suddenly restored to her. In the desk, were several old-fashioned pocket-books of quilted silk, containing journals and personal memoranda;—in one of them fancifully worked in straw, were several locks of hair. But the chief contents were papers;—packets of letters carefully tied up,—addressed in various handwritings, and ink so faded as to be almost illegible, to "Miss Rawdon, Heckington Hall."

The whole history of her mother's girlish life preserved as in amber!

Perhaps it was the powerful scent still exhaling from a little pierced ivory ball, full of

musk, that sickened the heart of poor Tiny. Or was it the overpowering consciousness that she was invading the sanctuary of the grave?—

CHAPTER XIII.

Aware that her father had undertaken a long ride in order to leave her free for the business of the morning, Miss Corbet, securing herself from intrusion, began with tearful eyes to examine the papers. The two or three first that met her eye, were formal birthday congratulations; or exhortations addressed by her grandfather to his little daughter in large round characters, calculated for the eye of a child. Next came a more voluminous packet:

—the handwriting of which, bore about the same degree of similitude to that in which her father now indited his cheques, or receipts, or rare epistles to herself, as the impassioned Henry Corbet of twenty, to the grave man of fifty-two.

Yellow and unsightly as they now were,—ragged and torn, and faded,—they were the intermediaries of that long courtship which had wearied away the youth of Sophia Rawdon of Heckington. They were the letters, looked for and waited for, and eventually smiled or wept over,—day by day, week by week, month by month, during the best years of her wasted life.—With reverent hands did her daughter lay them aside. There might come a time for remitting them to the hands of her father. At present, his grief for the mother of Alfred and Edgar was too recent to be carried back to an earlier source.

But what came next?—What was the origin of the bulky packet of letters written on the

huge quarto sheets of blue wirewove, in use forty years ago;—sealed with a huge seal, almost large enough for a borough-corporation, engraved with a snaky-looking initial and portcullis crest, such as she had noticed on the family-plate and chariot-rail of her aunt Jane?—Though addressed to her mother, it was not in Mrs. Enmore's cramped handwriting. The characters were bold, rampant, defiant,—characteristic of the hot-blooded Creole she had heard described in Reginald Enmore. That the letters were from *him*, she doubted not, even before the first was unfolded and its signature verified; and she no longer hesitated to read them, trusting she might thus attain some insight into the origin of the family antipathies so feelingly hinted by her stepmother.

The dates were the first thing that excited her surprise. When the first was written, Sophia Rawdon must have been several years younger than she was herself at that moment,

—long previous to his union with her sister Jane; and it was addressed to her, not at Heckington Hall, but at Higham Grange, where her parents seemed to be on a visit; young Enmore himself being a guest at Turberville Abbey!—

Still more astounding than this curious concatenation of events, was the fact that the first letter contained a passionate declaration of attachment!—Before the second was despatched, the enamoured young Creole seemed to have been driven to distraction by Miss Rawdon's assurance that it would be useless to apply to her father for permission to address her, her affections being irrevocably pledged to another. But this prohibition seemed only to have stimulated his frantic passion. He supplicated,—he threatened,—he stormed. He assured her that time must and should modify her sentiments. He was resolved, he said, to follow her home into Hertfordshire, and try his fortune with the fellow, whatever

he might be, who had forestalled him in her favour.

Whatever may have been her answer, his intentions were evidently carried into effect. Established in the neighbourhood of Heckington, he waylaid her, beset her, and had no difficulty in mastering the young girl's secret.

"That you should prefer to me an untaught boor, like Henry Corbet, the son of a mere yeoman who in his home at Grenfield is scarcely able to afford bread to his beggarly children, does indeed add to the poignancy of my disappointment," said the following letter. "But beware!—Be warned!—To such a match, Sophia, your prudent parents will never yield their consent; and if you persist in not answering my letters, it is to *them* I will at once appeal, and confide all I have discovered concerning your clandestine meetings with Henry Corbet."

To so insulting a letter, no one would have replied but a weak-spirited girl of scarcely

eighteen. Miss Rawdon was in great awe of her father; and trembled, moreover, lest the base espial and betrayal of young Enmore should prove the cause of some fatal quarrel. But her letters of remonstrance and entreaty served only to inflame the young barbarian, whose selfish passion left no room in his heart for mercy.

Burning with indignation, Tiny could not but wonder how *she* should have borne such letters as those which ensued: coarse and brutal, yet burning with a frenzy of love, compared with which, every other in the collection seemed tame and frigid.

And this enamoured ruffian was the husband of Mrs. Enmore:—this, the father of Arthur and Willy!—

The progress by which he attained these qualifications, was only too grievously demonstrated in the succeeding letters. Reginald Enmore had married not from love,—but hate!—After drawing down upon his "idolised

Sophia," the resentment and interdiction of Mr. Rawdon, by rendering others the medium of acquainting the proud family with her engagement to the "yeoman's son," and still finding her, though forbidden to see or communicate with young Corbet, insensible to his devotion, he turned upon her as a bitter enemy. As the surest means of ruin to her prospects, he came forward as the suitor of her sister, a girl scarcely out of the school-room; and as his fortune was considerable, his person attractive, and his court, both to Jane Rawdon and her family, abjectly assiduous, his suit was crowned with success.

In vain did poor Sophia argue with her young sister against uniting herself with a ruffian. The marriage was hurriedly accomplished; and almost before they quitted the altar, Enmore contrived to whisper to the pale trembling sister-in-law who was officiating as bridesmaid, that his sole object in the match was to secure the means of vengeance; that

while he lived, she should never become the wife of Henry Corbet, or inherit the lands of Heckington;—that his hatred should pursue them, even beyond the grave!

These inhuman menaces were renewed in the letter which announced to her that an heir was about to be born to Heckington;—and that he loathed her sister as much as he still loved herself. And with this terrible consciousness weighing upon her mind, was it wonderful that poor Sophia Rawdon wasted into the shadow of her former self; that, beset by terrors, and wounded in her tenderest feelings, she faded year by year under the harsh governance of the parents, continually irritated against her by the malicious representations of her brother-in-law?—When at length the death of his yeoman father enabled the warm-hearted young fellow so stigmatised by Enmore, to offer her a humble home, it was an ailing, broken-spirited woman he transplanted as his wife to Grenfield House!—

But the evil was not at an end. On finding his father-in-law, disgusted by his jealous, violent temper, gradually mollify towards the husband of his elder daughter, even so far, it was said, as to have executed a will in favour of her posterity in case she should give an heir-male to the property, Reginald Enmore, unable to bear the sight of the Corbets' restoration to favour, suddenly discovered the necessity of establishing his family at Fredville. West Indian grievances were beginning to be heard of, sufficiently to afford a plea for tormenting the old Rawdons by the removal thither of their idolised grandchildren.

He wanted to punish their toleration of Sophia and her husband. But this was not enough. It was the heart of Sophia herself he wished to wound. And when, on the death of her father, shortly afterwards, accelerated, it was supposed, by the grief of losing sight of the little fellows of whom he was so proud, the Corbets came into possession of Hecking-

ton, he addressed a farewell letter to Sophia, —the last of the collection which was now in the hands of her daughter,—maliciously threatening both herself and her expected babe. It would never, he assured her, see the light.—Banquo's issue should never reign in Heckington, even if murder were the price of their extinction!

As far as dates could determine the question, this terrible letter, received on the eve of her first confinement, was likely to have originated the death of that little brother, which Tiny had heard described by her grandmother as the result of her poor Sophia's precipitate removal to Heckington;—a loss doubly painful to its parents, as that of a first-born child, and the heir to such considerable possessions.

If ever again Reginald Enmore ventured to address his gentle victim, the record of his cruelty was not preserved. The following year, after giving birth to her daughter, poor Sophia sank into the grave!—

"Poor Sophia!"—Ay, worthy indeed of the designation: miserable in her destinies,—miserable in her inability to contend against them.—Her daughter, as, with folded arms and tears streaming down her face, she paced the very room which had perhaps witnessed a portion of her griefs and terrors, could scarcely refrain, even while her heart swelled with indignation against the persecutor, from deploring the weakness of the persecuted. Had she only possessed the courage to brave and denounce him!—Had she only dared the conflict and its consequences!—

Alas! how many, how *very* many, if they "only *dared*," would become great and good, instead of wretched!—

But as her anger and tears subsided, poor Tiny was forced to admit that, a year or two before, she herself should have succumbed under the enmity of one so unscrupulous as Reginald Enmore. It was only lately she had begun to think and feel with energy or

independence. Had not even her powerless aunt held her in durance?—Was she not, even now, afraid to address a letter to her cousin Willy?—

For the examination of the few papers remaining in the desk, she had not spirits. Hastily committing the whole collection to its keeping, as to a family vault in which it had been long buried, she tried to calm down her feelings to meet her father with decent composure at the dinner-table; bathing her swollen eyes again and again, that their redness might not attract the attention of little Edgar. But a thorn was in her heart; a thorn whose rankling would tend to promote that maturity of character which was converting an amiable girl into an earnest, stedfast woman.

Though the sorrows and alarms which previous to her birth had tormented her unknown mother were the thoughts ascendant in her mind, two surmises occurred to afford painful grounds for reflection: that the woman who

had so conscientiously abstained from touching the jewels and woman's gear under her charge, virtually her own, had also refrained from opening the family letters, she scarcely doubted. But unless Mrs. Corbet derived her insight into Mr. Enmore's character from his correspondence with her ill-fated predecessor, how was it to be accounted for?—Was it her husband who had prompted that death-bed warning against further connection between the families?—Was the father, apparently so unapt to revert to the past, still brooding over wrongs of which, during his married life, he had probably become cognizant?—

On the other hand, as regarded the offender himself, had the passion of this hot-headed Creole been pure and genuine? Or in seeking so wilfully and waywardly her mother's hand, had he, in the first instance, addressed himself to the heiress of Heckington, rather than the gentle Sophia Rawdon?

Alas! did not that mere misgiving afford

evidence of the taint of Rawdon blood in the veins of poor little Tiny? Was not what Willy was pleased to call Rawdon-of-Heckingtonism, apparent in the conjecture?

When she and her father met at dinner,—a meal to which the slender frugality of Grenfield rendered cheerful conversation an indispensable garnish,—the poor girl exerted herself to the utmost to meet him with a brightened countenance.

But, on Mr. Corbet's part, no such effort was needful. Whatever might have chanced during his absence, or whomsoever he might have met at Hertford, where he professed to have gone on business to the County Bank, he returned an altered man. His eye was bright, his brow unknit. His words came trippingly from the tongue. Grief might still be in his heart, but there was no vestige of it in his deportment.

Almost before dinner was over, he sent away little Edgar; bribing him to a quiet

departure by the promise of a pair of skates for the morrow, and a promise that the ice on the fish-pond should be swept for his use.

"Where do you think I have been, Tiny?" he said, as soon as the delighted boy had whistled his way up to his school-room.

"To Hertford—you told me this morning; —on business."

"Ay, but when I left you this morning, I had little thought what business it was to prove. A week ago, my dear, I got a letter from a London solicitor, addressed to 'Grenville Lodge,' acquainting me that, as he was uncertain of my address, I should find a communication lying for me at the Hertford Bank. Now, I am not fond of solicitors' letters; least of all when they call them 'communications.' I've had too many in my time, and seldom found 'em agreeable. When people have anything pleasant to say, they *come*, they don't write. So I laid the letter by, and thought the errand might wait.—I knew I should be

forced to go to Hertford at Assize-time, and then meant to call at the Bank."

Another sad token of her father's habits of procrastination, and want of moral courage!—

"But last night, when what we were talking of made me feel I should be glad to be absent from the house for a few hours, and that you'd be glad, perhaps, to get rid of me, I bethought me of the letter from John Meriton, junior, of Barnard's Inn, and away I went to Hertford; though, as you may have noticed, in no very enviable frame of mind."

"And I hope you found, dear papa, that some distant relation, or unknown benefactor had left you a fortune; and that the packet was full of thousand-pound notes?"—

"No, my dear. Such things occur in novels, not in real, every-day life. Even when a fortune *is* left, it is usually encumbered with some hateful condition, or a heap of mortgages, which render the bequest a curse. The only papers ever forwarded to me through a banker

were protested bills, or Exchequer writs, or some other abomination."

"The tone of your voice does not announce that you found anything of *that* description at Hertford," said Tiny, a little anxious that he should come to the point.

"Did you ever hear, my dear, of a relation of your mother's, named Lucretia Rawdon?"

"I know her well. I used to see her at grandmamma's, and I saw her again last year in Hertford Street. But surely it is not poor cousin Lucretia who has died, and left you this encumbered estate? She always passed in the family for the poorest of poor relations!"

"The busiest of busy ones, at all events. Not dead, by any means; and, as you say, with no estate to dispose of; though she has been meddling and making to obtain for me the custody of one."

"Heckington, of course!—Heckington is the dream of her life!"—

"Not the *dream*, I should think; for it

seems the old lady never rests!—For some time past, she has been besetting the trustees of the Rawdon property, as if acting at the suggestion of one of your cousins. And having been roughly answered by them or their clerks, ended by petitioning the Chancellor, and was referred to the Master, to whom the estate was entrusted at the time of the Enmore suit. Her memorial, or whatever it is called, stated that the house was going to rack and ruin,—that the agent appointed by the trustees neglected his duty,—that a Commission ought to visit the spot, and verify the truth of her statements."

"And is all this to be attended to?"

"It has been already done; and the Master is forced to admit that the interests of the minor and the estate have been shamefully neglected."

"So I had already heard from Willy Enmore.—But it is no affair of ours."

"I beg your pardon, my dear. It is very much our affair. Not only from the interest

I must ever feel in a spot so dear to your poor mother. But if anything happened to your two cousins while still unmarried, Tiny, to *you*, at the death of both, would revert the Rawdon estates."

"A somewhat remote contingency, papa!" replied Miss Corbet, with a deep blush. "Two healthier, heartier young men than Arthur and Willy, do not exist."

"Life and death are in the hands of providence, my dear. There are such things as accidents;—precipices to fall from,—seas to drown:—especially for two such hotheaded individuals as your cousins."

"In short, papa, you think me in great danger of becoming an heiress!"

"I wish I did. Nobody would turn her money to nobler account; though maybe I should be having you turn Pharisee on my hands, and build a church or a county-hospital, before the year was out!"—

"But what has the Lord Chancellor or the

Master in Chancery, or whoever has the Custody of Infants and the care of Heckington, decided about the matter?"

"What they usually decide,—nothing!—I sometimes think it is intended as a punishment to those who make out-of-the-way wills and endeavour to govern their property from one generation to another, that it is sure to be melted away in the burning fiery furnace of the Law. —Well, my dear,—for I see you are impatient for the kernel of the nut,—all this has ended in an application to me,—an official application from the Master,—to know whether it would suit me to undertake the custody of the property till the death of Mrs. Enmore;—to reside either at the mansion or Northover Farm, with a stipend of five hundred a-year, and a quarterly audit of my accounts."

"Reside at Heckington?"—repeated Miss Corbet faintly,—almost overcome by so singular a turn of fortune.—

"Or at Northover, which, being at present

unlet, I might farm for my own benefit.—What say you, Tiny?"—

"That you are more independent here, inhabiting a house of your own."

"Inhabiting a house which, small as it is, I have scarcely the means to keep up!—You must perceive, Tiny, by what you have lately accomplished, how sadly I and my poor wife have been pinched.—Five hundred a-year stipend is a temptation to a poor man with a couple of growing boys to be cared for."

"Certainly, certainly,—if it can be obtained with honour. But surely, papa, Arthur Enmore himself might be glad to reside at the Hall, on such an allowance?"

"The Master may not consider a man of two-and-twenty, sufficiently experienced for the custody of property in which, at present, he has only a life-interest. Nor, if as people say, he is engaged to be married to one of those giddy Horsfords, is he likely to desire

it, or devote himself to the improvement of the estate."

Against this proposition, Miss Corbet had no argument to offer.

"And what have you decided, papa?" she inquired, after a deliberative pause.

"In the first place, my dear child, *your* wishes, so long as you reside with me, will have a leading influence over my decisions. In the next, it will be better for us to visit Heckington together, and determine, on the spot, into what state of degradation the poor old place has fallen.—It would be mortifying, Tiny, — it would be humiliating to both of us,—if it proved so decayed and degraded, that nothing we could do, on our limited means, would enable us to raise it to its just level in the county.—If we are to live there as mere agents,—keeping brick-and-mortar together, and preventing the thistles in the shrubberies from overtopping the evergreens, we had best stay at Grenfield House."

Miss Corbet, to whom Grenfield House had not presented itself, that day, in its cheeriest aspect, replied faintly in the affirmative. She was secretly wondering whether a letter from her hand could reach Fredville, and obtain an answer, before her father was required to give in his ultimatum to that mystery to eyes profane,—that Eidolon to even the best initiated—Chancery, by itself, CHANCERY.

CHAPTER XIII.

It was a comfort to Miss Corbet that, Alfred having returned to Aldenham after his holidays, her father did not propose that the younger boy should bear them company in their visit to Heckington. In such an expedition, she wanted to be alone with one who had known and cared for her mother. Though far from a man of exquisite sensibility, the "yeoman's son" felt warmly and honestly, and would enter kindly into her feelings.

Estates and mansions left to be deliberately devoured by the gnawing tooth of a Chancery suit, are now, happily, of rare occurrence in our trimly island. In my childhood, and within range of my own country-home, I remember more than one reduced to a perilous condition: the tileless roofs, mere skeletons; the decayed floors pervious to a feruled walking-stick; the ceilings transparent as cobwebs; the chimneys blocked with jackdaws' nests;—enjoying the worst reputation, as haunted by ghosts; and fully deserving that of affording an unmolested retreat to vermin and reptiles.

Now, it is difficult to find a deserted house or abandoned pleasure-ground. The lover of the picturesque must content himself with admiring such scenes on canvas, or in letter-press. Heckington, however, had not yet reached its last worst stage of degradation. For five years past, ever since the property was thrown into Chancery, a decent allowance

had been assigned for "keeping it up;" and though this operation does not, in the eye or ear of the law, include the weeding of gravel-walks, the pruning of ornamental shrubs, the sowing of annuals, or heating of hot-air stoves, to render superfluously habitable a home without inhabitants, there were no gates hanging loose on their hinges, and no pigs running loose in the parterres.—Even this was more than Mr. Corbet had expected.

He had never set foot in the old place from the period of Mr. Enmore's return from the West Indies. Though aware that, abandoned as it was, it might be visited without hindrance, the distance from Grenfield rendered it out of reach of his pony; and a day's absence from home was a serious loss to the tender husband and careful husbandman.—Even now, though he had borrowed Dr. Ashe's solid old phaeton and mare for the expedition, the poor animal gave signs, long before she approached the Lodge-gates, that, having no particular inte-

rest in the estate, she found the journey a little too much for her.

Scarcely, indeed, had they reached half-way, when she was sufficiently distressed to excite the pity of the tribe of Horsford, whom they met in full force on their way to a neighbouring Meet; the daughters in an open barouche, with two strangers equipped for hunting in the back-seat, and one of the young Horsfords on the box, by way of chaperon. As no formal, black-edged card of "return thanks" had at present been issued from Grenfield House, the Clevelands family had judged it either not decorous or not necessary, to call there on their return from Somersetshire. Since they quitted Higham Grange two months before, they had been on what polite newspapers term "a tour of visits" in the south; that is, they had been spunging in all the houses of mark and likelihood on their road back into Hertfordshire, whose owners had even vaguely uttered to them that specious phrase of social

swindling—"Should you ever come to my part of the country, it will afford me much pleasure to see you."

Of their movements and progress, therefore, Miss Corbet was wholly ignorant; nor could she satisfy her father's surmises concerning the two young men arrayed in knowing hunting-frocks and top-boots, who, notwithstanding the care she took to let down her black crape veil before the approach of the well-known Clevelands carriage, stared her out of countenance, while she returned the friendly salutations of Flo. and Carry.

"Good-looking young fellows, both, though tolerably self-assured," was Mr. Corbet's sentence on the strangers; "particularly the one sitting opposite Florence Horsford. Fine face—showy figure."

His daughter could honestly say that she had been too much occupied in kissing her hand to her young friends to notice the sportsmen. But she *had* seen the impertinent smile

with which Miss Horsford recognised the doctor's old-fashioned equipage; and observed a whisper pass between Carry and her opposite neighbour.

In five minutes, however, the encounter was forgotten. After Mr. Corbet had observed that the young men had got a capital scenting-day, and that, the weather being so fine, there would probably be a full meet, the object of their own drive took exclusive possession of father and daughter.

By the first aspect of the Hall, Tiny was more disappointed than she would have liked to own. She had dwelt upon it so often since in early girlhood she last inhabited the place, and had listened to the exaggerated reminiscences of Lucretia Rawdon and her aunt, till she had begun to fancy it a palazzo; and the first thing that now struck her was the disparity between its proportions and extent. —The Jacobean architecture of the old brick edifice seemed ill-adapted to an ordinary

family house; and the ivy which still here and there mantled the walls, having been partially destroyed at different periods of reparation, gave it a mean and patchy look, instead of the venerable aspect which ivy, if left to itself, is sure to produce. Grass was springing between the loose stones of the porch and its pierced balustrade. But this was less unsightly than the weather-stained complexion of the stones themselves, green and slippery from damp.

Nothing could be more dreary than the spot, as it met Miss Corbet's eye, as she waited under the old porch, while her father drove round to the stables, in hopes of finding somebody to take charge of his horse;—those stables so well-filled and cared for, during his own short masterhood of Heckington! The tile-drains of the park being blocked up or broken in, the whole of the lower grounds had become a swamp: and, let off to neighbouring graziers, were in many places trampled into mire,—in all, rough, rushy, and neglected.

Parcelled off into pastures with the roughest hurdles, it looked more cheerless than a positive waste.

"Not exactly high-farming, hereabouts?" said Mr. Corbet, on his return; for, though far from a fancy agriculturist, he remembered how proud old Rawdon had been of his turf and trees; and the bright February sun which was now shedding a sort of glory over the distant hills, and waking up the bleating of the snow-white lambs with which the home park was studded, seemed to place in more miserable relief the neglected condition of the place.

"I will leave you to make the round of the house with this person," said he, after introducing to his daughter a peevish little old woman, encumbered by a heavy basket of keys, "while I proceed to the farm. If I find Northover likely to interest you, I will come back and fetch you to pay it a visit."

Though somewhat disappointed by this ar-

rangement, poor Tiny, as usual, resigned herself. She had hoped he would point out to her the rooms formerly inhabited by her mother, and the scenes of her customary haunts and occupations. But since it was clear, from his avoidance of the house, that he had not courage to confront these affecting recollections, or the sight of the family-pictures *she* was all eagerness to examine, she prepared herself to rest content with the company of the sulky old woman.

And thus, embellishing his absence by the ennobling motives with which amiable natures are apt to enhance the conduct of other people, she left him to the fulfilment of his real purposes; *i. e.* the examination of the roof, rafters, floors, sheds, and granaries of Northover.

Considering the account she had received from Willy Enmore of the dampness and chilliness of the Hall, when visited in the dog days, Miss Corbet was a little surprised to find it comparatively warm and airy. But

though this was in some degree the result of the difference produced by transition, in summer and winter, from the warm or cold external air, as we find in visiting any great church or public building, it was chiefly attributable to the fact that the shutters of the suites of rooms were unclosed, and the doors standing open.

"Perhaps you were expecting my father?" she said to her grim companion. "Perhaps Mr. Meriton or the trustees wrote to announce us?—You seem prepared for visitors."

"And well I'd need," was the muttered rejoinder. "There's always somebody or an-another coming a-bothering. I told the gentleman yesterday, I'd rather give up the care o' the place, for which ten shillen' a week is bare pay, than be continally ansering o' questions, and then being called over the coals for my ansers."

"Mr. Meriton, then, has been here?"

"I don't a-know strange folks's names—not

I. I was put in by the lawyers"—(she pronounced the ominous word "liars")—"and that's enough. Last hay-time, there com'd a young gent, as went rampaging about the place like a madman, wiping the picturs with his han'kercher, and tearing down the plants in the garden, as if he were master or more. And though I did my best to obleege him, and he guv' me a handsome token in acknowledgment, what does he do but goes straight to town and lodges a complaint that the house is neglected, and that me and my husband ought to be turned out, neck and crop."

That such was the result of her cousin Willy's visit, was no great surprise to Tiny. Still less, to learn that, shortly afterwards, arrived a fussy, grumbling, chattering, mischief-making old lady; who insisted on poking her nose into everywhere and everything, and could not keep her hands off the furniture, because, as she declared, she was a blood-rela-

tion to the family, and had made up her mind to see justice done to all parties.

That this visit of her officious cousin Lucretia, was the origin of the subsequent commission and the application eventually made to her father, was evident to Miss Corbet; and the arrival of one of the officials legally concerned for the estate, the preceding day, was probably attributable to the slackness shown by Mr. Corbet in making up his mind.

"I haint a-had no time to shut up the house, which the gentleman yesterday made me throw open from ground-floor to garret," growled the old woman. "And now, maybe, because you finds the doors and shutters open, you'll be going and reporting me, as the young gentleman did, and endeavour to get me and my husband turned off."

"We will do nothing unfair or unkind to you, or any one," replied Miss Corbet, who was beginning to tire of her grumbling; "provided you leave me to ramble about the house

unmolested. Some day or other, I am likely to reside here; and I am anxious to take a careful view of the house."

"Your genlleman's like to buy the place, then?" inquired the woman, peering into her face.

"*Buy* the place?—*Buy* Heckington Hall?" cried Tiny, in a tone of indignant surprise.

"Why, him as com'd yesterday, after turn-up his nose at everything he saw, and using bad language (which I hopes I'm too good a Christian to repeat), said, as he got on his horse to ride away, that 'twas a thousand pities the place warn't sold off at once;—that, as far as he was concerned, he'd be thankful to wash his hands on't;—and that he wished the Chancellor was forced to live in it, for a punishment,—or some such rubbish."

She spoke to inattentive ears. Miss Corbet had caught sight, in the yellow saloon, of the portrait of the two little girls with their basket of cherries, which had so haunted her memory;

and her cicerone, on seeing her seat herself on an opposite settee, as if rooted to the spot, mumbled something about having to attend to her good man's dinner, and the "'tatoes a-biling to bits," which purported to apologise for abandoning the stranger to her meditations.

Thus left to herself, poor Tiny was able to give way to her feelings. But which way did they tend?—Alas! how seldom do human emotions confine themselves to a single channel!—Is it from the strength or weakness of our nature that we think and feel in a thousand shallow streamlets, instead of condensing the flood of thought or feeling into one impetuous current, sufficiently powerful to overcome the obstacles of what we are pleased to call our fate?—

The sympathies of Henry Corbet's daughter were, in fact, pretty evenly divided between the long-lost mother who, in those now deserted chambers, had been persecuted by

Reginald Enmore almost to the grave; and the poor little Tiny, who in her white-frockhood had been almost as maliciously tormented by his sons. How distinctly did those hollow-sounding rooms bring back to her mind its early impressions:—the library, where an *auto-da-fè* had been perpetrated on her favourite doll;—the dark passage, where a black mask and domino had all but terrified her into fits;—the old Chapel, where a speaking trumpet had been put in requisition by her cousin Arthur to simulate the voice of their defunct grandfather, reproving her cowardice from the grave. Her stepmother was right! —An evil-nature had spoken out betimes in those boys. It was best for her that she should never see her dear cousin Willy again.

The recollections and reflections thronging to her heart, seemed to render the stagnant atmosphere of the old house too oppressive to be borne. Leaving the basket of keys to take care of itself, she hurried through the rooms

and across the echoing hall; into the air, elastic and warm with the vivifying influences of coming spring. Already, the scent of violets and gleam of snowdrops were perceptible.—But when she reached the well-remembered nook where the Macartney rose-tree was wont to flourish, she saw that not only the upper branches had been rudely torn from the wall, as if to bring down its blossoms; but that the trailing stems to which knots and rusty nails were still appended, had been killed by that frost of the preceding month, to which her brother Alfred was indebted for his first skaits.—The tree was dead.—Alas! for the omen!—She now fancied that it was not only best, but *certain*, that she would never see her dear Willy again!—

Wandering on and on, among the overgrown old-fashioned thickets of yew, or alaternus and ilex, black with age and rusty as a group of seedy curates gathered together by a Visitation, a cheerful clump of mezereon vivid

with blossom, occasionally brightened the gloom. The elasticity of the air gradually restored her. It seemed to her, as it has done to many, that nature revives earlier under the shelter of an old Dutch Garden, with its cozy nooks and intervening walls. The sweeping lawns of a modern landscape, though charming in their full tide of Midsummer luxuriance, are too open and shelterless for any garden of Eden but that of the foxhunter.

She was not long left to her cogitations. While she stood watching the carp darting about, as of old, in the marble reservoir, as if in chase of the first spring sunbeams, her father's rough arm was fondly laid on her shoulder, and she was told that the "trap was waiting." The two hours allotted for the bait of the old mare, had expired like a moment; and Mr. Corbet was impatient to be off. Charmed with all he had heard and seen, he was in the highest state of exhilaration.—

There are various kinds of amateurship in

this world of whimsies. Pictures and sculptures,—gems and fossils,—black-letter editions and antique binding—have their enthusiastic admirers. But a man like the yeoman's son of Grenfield House, was far more likely to be enraptured with all he had been examining at Northover, than by the choicest gallery, library, or museum extant. It was on this model-farm that Mr. Enmore, during his occupancy of Heckington, had expended so large a portion of his fortune. Every modern improvement was there which science has contributed to the destruction of agriculture, since farming became a toy for the royalty and nobility of the realm as well as the means of human sustenance. Not a prize or patent implement but was rusting in its outhouses.—Every species of machine was standing useless in its sheds.—But what outhouses, and what sheds!—What asphaltic pavement, and what enamelled mangers!—Poor Mr. Corbet seemed to regard with envy the beast

of burthen or stalled ox, to whom such luxuries were supplied.

The home-staying man had never happened to see these playthings of husbandry, except at an Agricultural Show, or the great Exhibition; and contrasting them with the homely worn-out appliances of Grenfield House, its clumsy plough, and lumbering tools,—its dilapidated cowhouses and tumble-down styes, —he seemed to look upon Northover as the Peri looked on Paradise. With such accessories, he should readily realise a fortune. With such adjuncts, he should carry all the prizes of the Smithfield show. The Eidolon of a Heckington ox, to which the much-limned Durham one would be as a skeleton, already swelled like an exquisite vision before his mind's eye.

"You have determined then, papa, to accept the proposal made by the trustees?" inquired Miss Corbet, as they walked back hurriedly to the stables where the phaeton awaited

them:—Mr. Corbet, enlarging as he hurried her along, (for the day was already overclouded,) on the merits of all he had seen, and the miracles he hoped to accomplish.

"Of course I have, my dear. Of course,—of course!—It would be madness to decline. The farm is wrought to my hand. A fortune might be made on such premises."

"But would it not be fairer if the refusal were first offered to one of my cousins?"

"*Why*, Tiny?—As a matter of equity, *your* title to the Rawdon property is as good as theirs. As a matter of law, the custody of the place has been tendered to me by its legal guardians. What would you have more?" said he, as he carefully placed her in the phaeton, after, in the exuberance of his good-humour, over-liberally remunerating the cross old woman and her husband.

"Nothing more. As you state the case, it seems right and just. You are the best judge

of such matters. But what is to become of poor Grenfield?"

"It will be easy to find a tenant."

"You did not find it easy, I have heard you say, on a former occasion."

"Ages ago—before you were born, Tiny: when there was no railroad,—when London had not been brought so near us."

There was no occasion for, or rather no possibility of, rejoinder. One of those rattling showers which suddenly obscure the clear blue sky of a spring day, was cutting against their faces, defying the shelter of an umbrella, and glueing down her black veil to the face of poor Tiny. Conversation was at an end. They could only push the old mare into her briskest pace, and be thankful that two hours of discomfort would secure them dry clothes and a warm fireside.

The road lay clear before them. The cottage-doors were closed. The very chimneys had ceased to reek. The poultry, with droop-

ing feathers had retreated to their roosts. The cattle stood elegiacally desponding in the drenched pastures. Not so much as a sparrow on the house-tops!

Near the turn to the Clevelands' Lodge, however, they encountered two draggled sportsmen, wet to their skins, and splashed with mud from the sole of their boots to the button of their hunting-caps; one of whom, as he recognised the wheezing old mare pointed out in the morning by Miss Horsford, vouchsafed a slight salutation to the driver.

The Corbets could not distinguish, their faces being bowed down to avoid the pelting rain, whether the young gentleman by whom they were thus scantily patronised, were one of the young Horsfords, or some guest visiting at the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

The habitually inert mind of Mr. Corbet was so much excited by the pleasant change in his prospects, that he resolved to complete his arrangements both promptly and in person. He even declined, as an impediment, the company of his daughter; who would fain have visited town for a glimpse of the little Amy Armstead, which was already half smothered in muslin mechlin and mother-love, in the arms of her friend. She accordingly remained

at home to plan and project the removal of their household and household gear; while her father, in the office of the Accountant-General, was taking an oath of his solvency, and signing an engagement for the management of the Heckington estate, and lease of Northover Farm.

For the first of these details, the agreement, stood of course from "year to year, during the lifetime of Mrs. Jane Enmore, widow, formerly Jane Rawdon, spinster, on whose decease her eldest surviving son was to come into the enjoyment of the property;" and it was proposed that Henry Corbet, Esq., of Grenfield House, should be placed in possession on Lady Day next ensuing, viz., in three weeks' time.

As he trudged gleefully back to the station with the duplicates of these documents deposited in his inner-pocket, the honest man could scarcely believe in his good fortune. It was some drawback that his luck was not shared by

the loving wife with whom he had struggled through so many days of neediness. But then came the reflection that it would have been pain and grief to the invalid to quit the Grenfield where she was born, and the shabby old house which was as much a part of herself as the limpet's shell of the limpet.

Towards the middle of the day which Tiny was devoting to the final examination of her mother's papers, to which her recent visit to Heckington imparted a double interest, she was startled by the sound of visitors on horseback approaching the house. From her own room, though the window was open to admit the cheering spring-sunshine, she could not examine them without being seen; and as she had issued strict orders of non-admission to all and sundry, she was not surprised to hear a discussion arise concerning card-leaving.

"Gone to London, eh?" said a voice, which she readily recognised as that of the old squire

of Clevelands, who seemed to have partly misunderstood the answer of the flustered maid-servant. And thus warranted in regarding Grenfield House as free-quarters, the whole party talked out as freely as if in the Great Desart or the Prairies.

"You must leave a card," said the voice of Flora Horsford, addressing one of her companions.

"I shall do nothing of the kind," replied the person addressed. "I am here as a stranger."

"Not to say an enemy!" rejoined another. "But as *I* am neither, allow *me* to show that I have paid my compliments, in person, to Mr. and Miss Corbet."

A sarcastic burst of laughter hailed his declaration; accompanied by remarks and exclamations which were rendered inaudible to Tiny by the stamping of the horses who seemed to take as a signal to themselves the hilarity of their riders.—Much would she have

given for a peep at the group. But after the announcement of her absence assumed by Mr. Horsford, this was doubly impossible; and she heard them canter off, half-a-dozen in number, laughing loudly, and talking loudly, as a merry country-party of young people are apt to do when enlivened by the first sunshine of the year.

How different the state of *their* spirits from her own, as she hung over those yellow letters, and pondered on her approaching departure from her poor old room!—But there was something in even the mirth of the Horsfords that seemed artificial. They were always acting;—always talking for effect.—*Them* she could never envy, and never love.

The cards were brought up; that of the old squire, with the name of his daughters and Mr. Robert Horsford, inscribed in pencil. The second card explained the familiar voice of the more courteous speaker.—"Mr. Charles Turberville,"—Turberville Abbey being ef-

taced to make way for the address of "Clevelands."

She was both startled and pleased. Since she quitted Somersetshire, she had thought little of the mere guests at Higham Grange. Absorbed as she had been in family interests of the most sacred importance, Turberville Abbey had almost escaped her recollection. But her interest now revived. The parents of Charles Turberville had come forward so kindly to welcome her, that she felt mortified at being unable to requite their attentions by similar hospitality to their son. Not that she was in the slightest degree ashamed of the inadequate proportions and establishment of Grenfield House. But her father in his broad hems, herself in her deep mourning both of body and soul, were little qualified to afford entertainment to an inmate of the Horsfords; who treated all and everything this world contains, as matter for "chaff."

As to the nameless visitor who had called

himself a "stranger and an alien," he had spoken so ungraciously, that she troubled herself little about him; and her father, on his return from town to a late dinner, or rather early supper, was too full of his morning's transactions and the total revolution impending in his domestic affairs, to feel interested by the contingencies of a morning visit. "People staying at Clevelands, in want of an object for their morning's ride.—What on earth could it signify?"

The hundred pounds, almost forced upon him by the Messrs. Meriton by way of earnest for their bargain, seemed almost to burn in his pocket. He wanted the morrow to dawn, that he might go forth into the village of Grenfield, —pay off his trifling outstanding accounts, and acquaint the strait-coated young Reverence who replaced at the parsonage his defunct wide-skirted father-in-law, that, if he heard of a tenant for Grenfield House with fifty acres of excellent land, it was to be had on lease. Could

he have followed the bent of his inclinations, he would have slept that very night under the slated roof of the model-farm whose water-courses were clear as the pipes of an organ; whose flues were calculated to warm, boil, and stew,—do everything but smoke;—whose doors had a bifold movement,—whose floors were fire-proof, — whose granaries damp-proof,—whose walls weather-proof,—whose bolts and bars burglar-proof; whose whole structure, in short, was so scientifically calculated, that neither moth nor rust could corrupt, nor any enemy break through and steal—save that subtilest of all—DEATH!—

Next day, their preparations began: an endless packing of trunks, nailing of deal-cases, matting-up of furniture, cording of chests. Though no inestimable pictures were to be removed, as for the Art-Treasure Exhibition, no rich plate to be embedded in baized plate-chests, or china in bran or saw-dust as for the glorification of an Ambassador

Extraordinary, a variety of old family rubbish, respectable in the eyes of the Corbets, were to be suitably cared for; and little Edgar was left to clap his hands for joy, or ply his skipping-rope along the coach-road, in token of glee at the prospect of change, while the servants assisted Miss Corbet in her preparations, or received the sorrowful condolences of the poor of the village of Grenfield, who poured in to inquire into the truth of their Exodus.

Huge unsightly packages were encumbering the entry and passages,—parlour and hall,—carpets rolled up,—chairs piled up,—tables dislocated,—curtain-rods and screen-poles tied together, fascis-fashion, — everything in the dust, litter and misery of a *déménagement* of the humblest order;—furniture little better than we see rocking about in cottage-carts at Lady Day or Michaelmas,—the household havings of John Smith or Jem Snooks; — when there came a loud ring at the house-

bell, and a claimant for admission who would not be denied.—Not a dun, gentle reader!—Not a dun, noble reader!—Harry Corbet had already applied his recently-attained resources to sweep away the swarm of midges, which, in *his* case, represented the fiery dragons by which *your* statelier portals are occasionally beset.

"Admit the lady immediately!" exclaimed Tiny;—adding by way of explanation to her father, with whom she was conferring in the back-ground concerning pack-wagons and tarpaulin,—"It is my cousin—Lucretia Rawdon!"—

END OF VOL. I.

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